

THE ARGOSY.

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GABRIEL'S APPOINTMENT.

CHAPTER XXII.

BEFORE THE WEDDING.

A BRIGHT and happy festival season, by the seaside, succeeded to the anxious vigils of those weeks in the City; and Gabriel and Edith, passing nearly all their time together, basked in the sunshine of their prosperous love, and looked as if care and trouble could never touch them more. The peculiar circumstances of their engagement, making him dependent on her tenderness, had left Edith Leicester no time for reserve or doubts; as Tiny said, the wooing was put off till after the wedding, on account of the bridegroom's health; and the rule meanwhile, as between convalescent and nurse, appeared to be that he might ask or claim whatever he pleased, so long as he earned it by growing strong and well.

Strong and well he could not become at a moment's notice, even under such happy auspices; but he was mending by steady degrees, and, but for vigilant watching, might prematurely have overtasked his strength. As it was, between rides on the downs and strollings by the shore—watching the sunset at one time, and the moonlight at another—books, music and conversation—his hours were tolerably taken up, without the perilous excitement he was ordered to avoid.

The wedding was to take place in the last week of April, and David Forrest—to whom, as to many other hard workers, the season had brought a welcome though brief period of relaxation—timed his holiday that he might comply with the general request and perform the service. Arriving, as usual, at the last moment, he was hurried by the guard into the nearest carriage, where two gentlemen were talking so eagerly behind their newspapers that they hardly noticed his entrance. It was some little time before he noticed them, but

their discussion waxing warm, they forgot the caution they had preserved at first, and names were spoken aloud which could not but attract his ear.

"I tell you it is a positive fact. Burlington Ford was taxed with it, and could only say, like poor Dickens's old Frenchman, that everything was possible. That was a great admission from one who never admits anything he can help."

"Well, it may be true, but the fair Helen must have altered not a little in her tastes. I remember the day when the best authority made her over to Gabriel Bruce—long before he took to gold-digging."

"She would have been very much obliged if the authority had been good enough to make good his words; but there never was a chance. Bruce behaved very well, I recollect—for he was invited, and fêted, and flattered, as everybody could see—but he contrived to let it be seen that it wouldn't do. And Strahan will be able to give her a good settlement, which is, after all, the essential point."

"I can't believe that Strahan is in earnest. Why, it was only the other day people were speculating about him and Miss Leicester. Do you mean to say that they are both going to console themselves by uniting their griefs?"

"Something very like it; and what's more, it is said that the fair lady has been moved to consent by the whisper that the diamonds of the late Lady Strahan will eventually come to herself—I don't exactly know how."

"Strahan does, you may depend; and that accounts for your story—only he happens to have a daughter living."

"Yes, but don't you know ——" And here the voices dropped, and the noise of the train drowned all the rest of the conversation.

It had furnished David with matter for reflection during the greater part of the journey, and it was with a sense of relief that he saw Hartley Carroll waiting for him at the end of it. Philip Forrest had been sent for at the last moment, and had yielded to the general petition that his brother might be spared to his friends the first evening.

"He may not be at liberty for some hours, and it is as much as your life is worth to meddle with parish work while you are here, so your only safety is with us. No broken heads this time in the train, I hope? Any clue to your mystery?"

"Not exactly a clue. Indeed, the attempts to find one have done us more harm than good. As far as I am concerned, I only want the police to let us alone."

"I saw something in the paper about a missing boy being suspected. Is that the case?"

"A boy is missing, certainly; and so long as this commotion is kept up, I don't see how we are to get him back. I would rather have lost twice as much by the fire, and kept the poor lad."

"I understood he was one of your idlest, most incurable of little rascals. Does that add to his value?"

"Yes, for it adds to his danger. I have done all I could by speaking to the authorities, and got them to promise he shall not be scared away if he has a mind to come back; so I hope still. How are you all getting on?"

"You will hardly know your patient again, though we are cautioned that he must not play tricks with himself. We may well take care of him, for he is the best fellow in the world, and Sir Matthew was perfectly right—he would have been quite thrown away as a poor man."

"He is as generous-hearted as ever," said David, not forgetful of the startling aspect of his offertory bag after Gabriel's last appearance in the chapel. "I hope he may not be paying too high for his good fortune. Business matters are all arranged by this time, of course."

"His friend Herbert is down here, and all the settlements have been attended to. And what is more, Forrest, I don't mind telling you a bit of a secret—he has twisted the legs of the old man of the sea off my neck, and for an old married man as I am, I feel mightily inclined to throw my hat in the air, and whoop."

David's look and manner invited further confidence, and Hartley confessed that he had been in some difficulty of late for want of fresh capital, which he could only obtain through Strahan, and that on perilous terms; that Bruce had in the noblest way arranged to embark the bulk of his fortune in the business, so that both difficulty and danger would be removed—a service which Hartley could hardly have expected, but which he trusted to repay tenfold in profits.

"And can you insure him against risk?" asked David.

"As to that, he will not run any that I do not share. No man can pretend to entire safety, or, if he does, people are very silly to believe him; but you would have no City of London worth mentioning, Master Davie, if nobody ever ran any risks in business."

"You seem to have gone rather too far in that line, by your own account. I would not be too sure that I had done with Strahan."

"Oh, I have no fears now on that score. He will be glad to get his money, now I can serve his turn no longer. Between ourselves, I hope he is attending to his own private affairs, instead of mine. Ah! you look as if you had heard something about it. Commend me to a parson for always knowing the last bit of gossip! What is it?"

"Not much; only talk in the train." And David briefly repeated what he had heard. Hartley shook his head.

"When I carried the report to my ladies, Edith was slow to believe it; but then it goes hard with any woman to realise that her loss can be so soon forgotten. It is a curious turn of events, but I begin to think it must be true."

So Edith herself thought, when she heard the rumour thus confirmed, but she was as far from understanding it as ever. The Fords were in apartments near them, and among the few guests invited to the wedding—and Helen Ford was often with her friends, and certainly with no outward signs of being engaged, or expecting so to be. Her spirits were generally even, and it was difficult to know from her conversation whether she were happy or otherwise. That evening, however, when she and her brother came, as they sometimes did, to tea, she seemed disposed to be a little more communicative.

"What accounts have you from Miss Kerr?" she asked Edith, while the gentlemen were all discussing some knotty point at the other end of the room. "Does she like her sitter? I fancied she might find the work more difficult than she thought."

Edith quoted some passages from Alice's letters: which were mostly in a cheerful strain, though the longing to see her friends again could not be concealed. She wrote warmly of Mrs. Salisbury's kindness, and of Myra generally with compassion.

"Ah!" said Helen Ford, "her very caution tells its own tale. That poor child is born to be a burden and misery to herself and everyone else, I am afraid."

"They give hopes of her gradual improvement."

"Her father has none; he confessed as much, and that it is out of kindness to Mrs. Salisbury that he has left her so long under her care. The poor old lady doats on the child, and I believe spoils her terribly, but no one can have the heart to interfere—at any rate, for the present. In time, of course, she must be with her father for part of the year."

Edith looked up inquiringly; her companion coloured a little and smiled.

"Is it really so, Helen?" asked Miss Leicester, softly. "Are Sir Jesse Strahan's family arrangements then becoming of so much interest to you?"

"It looks like it, does it not? But I am not surprised that you are slow of belief. I am not romantic, you know, Edith, and never was; and the older I grow, the less I see to make one hope ever to be really happy in this world, so a small amount of good is not to be despised. He is a friend of some years' standing; his position is good, and his influence large. I am quite aware how much he admired you, and that it was only lately his hopes were scattered to the winds; but, without flattery, I take it as a compliment to myself that he can imagine me capable of supplying your place."

"And it is settled, then? You have made up your mind?" said Edith, unable to conceal the regret with which she received the news.

"Oh, yes, my mind is made up," repeated Miss Ford, somewhat ironically; "made up to endure all that will be said or thought of

me for preferring sober commonplace comforts to heroism and genteel poverty."

"Preferring?"

"Yes—that implies a choice, does it not? I have been tempted in my time to think as you are thinking now; but I have seen so many wake up out of those dreams, to find all a dull blank reality, that I choose rather not to dream at all. I begin with the reality, so that I escape the disappointment."

"If you mean what you say, I am very sorry for you, Helen."

"Thank you, my dear, for your pity. When you require it, you shall have mine."

"I am sure of that; but, Helen, this at least I know: no sorrow or trouble can ever be more real than that which you call a dream. It is much more than I deserve; but there it is, and I see it and know it. To do what you are doing would be to me——" She checked herself as Helen's face darkened, and the sentence was left unfinished. Miss Ford made no reply, but, as if nothing had been said, took up a volume of Murray lying on the table, and began to talk of meeting on the Continent. What had they decided to do first? Edith said there was an idea of seeing the Bay of Naples, and if it were carried out, they wished to arrange for Alice Kerr to join them. It had been settled that she had better not interrupt her work to attend the wedding, but Gabriel had set his heart on giving her the trip afterwards. Their own plan was to spend a little time in Normandy first, and Alice might join them in Paris. Miss Ford heard and approved, and suggested that perhaps they should be able to bring her with them, and make up a party, at any rate for a little while. Burlington had some lectures to get up, which would compel him to visit one or two places about which his memory was hazy. They should be quite independent of each other, but it would be pleasant if their plans could be combined. Nothing more was said about Sir Jesse Strahan, and Edith could only acquiesce with a good grace. She still hoped that delay might prevent the marriage, but her friend's manner precluded all expression of feeling, and it was a relief when she took her departure and left Miss Leicester at liberty to ask her sister's opinion.

Mrs. Carroll received the intelligence very coolly.

"My dear," she said, "have you known Helen Ford so long without being aware that she is always wiser than other people—not only in seeing what nobody else can see, but in being blind to that which stares everybody in the face? If she has discovered what none of us could find in our friend Sir Jesse, she must either make herself happy with him, or own herself mistaken, which she never did yet; so, on the whole, I think it rather good news."

"These events are thickening round us in rather a startling manner," said Hartley. "Of course, Davie, you will stay to marry your own parishioner to the big Cornishman?"

"I hope so: but I was rather surprised to hear that my friend Joel was to be married so soon."

"Why should he wait?" said Gabriel. "He has plenty of money for one of his class, and I know no one who better deserves a good wife."

"I am glad of it, for Lucy Pyne is a good girl, and I shall miss her sadly. By the way, is her sister to be present?"

"No," said Edith, "and we cannot make it out. I wrote to her, and to Alice Kerr, offering to make any arrangement that might enable the sisters to be together; but Grace declined coming at all, and is to receive Lucy at Lowlevels. Lucy says little about it, but I know she thinks it strange, and so do I."

"Then you do not take Lucy abroad with you?"

"Oh, no, I am quite independent of a maid, and it is settled that she and Joel shall go and take care of the house, and perhaps send Martin after us."

"I would give something to hear you explaining art and history to the Ironhand; but what made Grace refuse to take the journey? Was it economy?"

"Scarcely, when I would have paid her expenses. I cannot understand it, for she evidently has some reason, which she does not like to give."

"I'll have a talk with Lucy to-morrow, and see what she thinks of the matter," said Mr. Forrest: and the subject was dropped for the time.

In private conversation that night with his brother Philip, it was, however, revived; for every event, however trivial, was of consequence now that seemed to be connected with the conspiracy against Gabriel's person. The last attempt was still unexplained; but David had learned from his small handmaiden, Sally, in a burst of confidential penitence, that a man round the corner had given her sweeties for bringing word what was done at the parsonage, and she had been told by Bill Close that something was going to happen which would give them a holiday and no end of half-crowns. The non-fulfilment of this latter clause had had some effect in stirring up her remorse, but she could throw no light on the boy's disappearance, whom she had last seen and heard shouting "Fire!" in the yard.

One circumstance had lately transpired; a helmet, of the Fire Brigade pattern, had been picked up, and traced to a small theatrical warehouse, which supplied some of the minor houses of entertainment with costumes. But no evidence appeared to show how recently it had been used for stage purposes, and the fear of frightening Bill Close away for ever had considerably damped the good priest's ardour in the investigation.

"They might have burned twice as much, and I should not have cared, if they had only left me my boy," he repeated with a sadness which his brother well understood. And he comforted him with the

assurance that he would probably see his young friend turn up in a few months' time, all the better for having been well thrashed on board a collier.

"You may depend upon it he has run away," said Philip, "and is seeking his fortune as cabin boy, and will find it—at the rope's end. I have seen more of this than you have, perhaps. Your boys will make a hero of him when he comes back."

"I wish they may, for at present they threaten him with a ducking. I fancy they got that idea from one of the Ironhand's stories."

"Ah! that strange fellow has attracted you as he did me."

"He has—and my heart aches when I think of him."

"Why so, Davie?"

"Because he might be made something great—and yet any evil influence might just be his ruin."

"Have you any idea who and what his parents are?"

"From what Bruce has told me, and what he has himself mentioned, I fear his father was one of the many instances of 'going to the dogs'—unless, which is quite possible, his mind was disordered, and he morbidly accused himself of deeds he had never done. His son's evidence seems to point that way, but he is very chary of his confidence, and it will not do to press for it."

"What is his own amount of capacity?"

"He is as full of intellect as a New World forest of vegetation, and, of course, all is wild and tangled. I tried a little chopping and hewing to let in light and air, but in so short a time could not hope to do much."

"Well, Nelson seems to have fraternised with him, from a letter I had yesterday; but he is puzzled, as we are. He says that the ladies, who are the best judges in these cases, seem to ignore Martin's servanthip altogether, and that he is quite at his ease in their society: unless he begins to think about it, when he stiffens himself directly."

"Anything disturbed him at Lowlevels yet?"

"Nelson adds, in a postscript, that he is in hopes of tracing the old mystery by his help; but that another has come up, which has rather startled him, and may, perhaps, be connected with the first. It is a strange business altogether, but I don't like the idea of Bruce going away with his wife quite alone."

"Nor I, but you will not persuade him that there is any cause for fear. He does not know the meaning of the word."

"I trust he may never learn it—as poor Frank Nelson did. Look here, Davie—I must have a few days' holiday soon—what do you say to our running down together to this modern Udolpho, and seeing what our united wisdom can discover?"

It sounded very tempting, and David promised to consider the matter. While they were still talking it over, Joel Treherne arrived with a message, and was at once called into their council, and made acquainted with what they knew. He shook his head when he heard

about the stage helmet; it certainly seemed to confirm one of his suspicions; but when Lucy had named the subject to her friends, they were so indignant and offended, she had some difficulty in avoiding a great quarrel. "And to be sure," added he, "there was no proof against them: they owned they had played us a trick, but only out of good humour. I've a notion, sir, that Wily Wilkins got a twist of his arm that night, which will keep him out of the way for a while. I seemed to feel him shrink up into nothing in my hand."

"And these friends of Lucy's knew nothing about him?"

"Never heard of his name. They knew Mr. Jones, they said, who mended clocks and jewellery; but, as to anything else, they were ready to fly at her for hinting at it. She doesn't think Caterina will ever be the same to her again."

"I should be sorry that Lucy lost a friend: if she really is one."

"So should I, sir: and I wanted to ask Mr. Philip Forrest something about that house where sick girls can have a breath of sea air. Lucy and me have been talking about the poor maid, Caterina's sister—and we'd stand the expense and welcome, if by-and-by she could be got down here for the little bit of a change that she was pining for."

"All right, Joel; I'll let you know when there is a vacancy."

"Thank you, sir; there's no great hurry, for she is in full work now as a fairy, and can't be spared—not to get well, that is. I suppose they'll give her a holiday to die in, poor maid."

"Is she so ill?"

"Breathing red fire and gas, night after night, is just poison to her, they say, and affects her brain, so that she fancies all sorts of strange things. And Lucy takes it to heart, and I promised to do what I could."

The brothers applauded his kindness, and made a note of the case, that David might find some way of interesting the proprietor of the theatre; who might not, after all, be to blame. With this Joel went back to comfort Lucy.

His nearest way lay past the house in which Miss Ford and her brother had apartments; Burlington Ford, as he went by, was standing on the steps, talking to a smart, trim figure, in a dress between uniform and livery, carrying in his hand a cap with a gold band, and wearing a courier's pouch. They were arranging plans, by what he overheard, for a tour, and Mr. Ford was giving orders about some boxes that were to be ready by a certain day, and which the courier, as he seemed to be, was to take under his charge. The accent of the latter was foreign, though he spoke English well. As Joel had understood that the brother and sister were to meet his master abroad, this caused him no surprise, and he was passing on, after touching his hat, when Burlington called out, "Time nearly up, Joel?"

The courier, whose back had been towards the road, started as if

he had been struck, and looked after the tall Cornishman, who had only returned the greeting with a rather sheepish bow.

"If you please, sir, does Mr. Bruce's servant travel with him?"

"No; Mr. Bruce and his bride start alone."

The man drew a long breath, as if relieved, and asked nothing more.

The last evening came. The sisters, who had been so little separated in their lives that they had never realised what separation meant, were busy over some final arrangements, which helped them to forget that it was near: and Gabriel, wearied with the exertions of the day, was reclining in an easy chair, with his friend Mr. Herbert and Hartley Carroll on either side. The conversation, which had been lively enough at dinner, had sunk into silence, and even Hartley was thoughtful and grave. He was quite aware that Mr. Herbert had strongly objected to Gabriel's placing so much of his fortune in his hands, and at that moment he was half inclined to regret that he had accepted it. To be sure, he had done nothing underhand; Bruce had seen and judged for himself, and, as he told David Forrest, ran no risk that the firm did not share; but the dear old fellow had been so generous, so trusting in the way he did it—not ignoring possibilities of disaster, but taking his chance for the sake of giving one—if he did bring him to ruin, what on earth should he do? What hole would be mean enough for him to creep into?

"Bruce!" he said, so suddenly that both his companions started, "if I don't pay you ten per cent. in ten years, I'll make an appointment myself, and go out to seek my fortune as you did."

"Don't do that," said Gabriel, gently.

"Why not? Your story is the most encouraging that ever was told. You have won all you tried for—what more would you have?"

"Peace to enjoy it—and that I am never to have."

"You are tired, old fellow; I never saw you hipped before."

"You never saw me so near the summit of happiness; but the fact of reaching the top implies looking down at the bottom. I suppose it is that which makes me feel to-night as if the turn of the tide were against me, and those hounds, who are always on our trail, would get at our throats at last. And I have been selfish enough to draw that angel into the danger! God in His mercy watch over her!"

"Bruce, you are exciting yourself—we shall have you laid up if you do not keep quiet. What danger can there be for Edith, so long as you are safe?"

"I cannot explain—but I am sure it is there. You will laugh when I tell you—I could laugh myself—that this afternoon, as I was watching the passengers go on board the steamer, I heard a voice behind me that brought back, all in a moment, the scene in the railway carriage. I seemed to be there—to hear the sound—to feel the crash: as I almost feel it now."

"Did you see anybody you knew?"

"No; the crowd was too great."

"But the voice——?"

"Was that of the man who struck me."

CHAPTER XXIII.

MYRA STRAHAN LEARNS A NEW WAY OF WINNING GOLD.

THE parish of Level Bridge had several outlying hamlets; with cottages in secluded nooks, which it required some local knowledge to find out. In her younger days, Mrs. Salisbury had been familiar with them all, and had braved many a snow-storm, many a sultry sun, to visit the sick and aged, or look up the refractory. Her influence had been a strong one in its time; it had declined with her capacity for active work; but in the traditions of the elder generation Madam was still an authority to be quoted with respect—and even, in extreme cases, to be appealed to. Over a few of her old acquaintances the lady still kept a tender watch; and Alice Kerr received more than one lesson in rural visiting, by accompanying her on some of these errands. In return, she told all she knew, and a good deal she had only heard, about the mission work in St. Edmund's; and though some of the doings almost took Madam's breath away, she listened with unfeigned interest, and owned, with a somewhat rare humility, that many things were thought of now which were overlooked in her youth, and which she was now too old to learn.

It was the more refreshing to converse with a frank, intelligent girl like Alice Kerr in these matters, that Myra openly repudiated them. She did not like poor people, except when they were working to please her; and that there could be any pleasure in giving was far beyond her comprehension. Alice had won her respect by earning gold for herself, as Martin had by finding it; but it was in vain to try and lure her into the pleasant paths of unselfish benevolence—in vain to tell her stories of poor starving children, without clothes or fire, in hopes that her sympathies might be reached through her imagination. She would listen eagerly, enjoy all the melancholy details, and wait for the catastrophe, as if it had been that of Little Red Riding Hood; but the arrival of kind ladies with blankets and soup always seemed, like the modern version of the woodcutters, to spoil the story. And any attempt to draw out the moral made her sulky at once.

Her portrait had been often delayed by her fits of indisposition; she had taken a great liking to Alice Kerr, and would often mind a word from her sooner than one from her grandmother; but there were days when she could not keep still five minutes together, and then there was nothing for it but to follow her about the house, and humour her restlessness by finding it an object. Alice's school experience was invaluable at such times; she had too often had to

keep a juvenile class contented on small means, not to be fertile in expedients for creating cheap happiness; and when everything else failed, had one grand argument in favour of turning over books, rummaging drawers, or ransacking dusty lumber-rooms. They might find a treasure somewhere—who could tell? Bank-notes had been hidden in old volumes—money might have been dropped in odd corners—she herself had once found a franc in the pocket of an old dress which she had quite forgotten, and with it she bought a ribbon, and made up a bow which one of the day boarders bought for two francs. Imagine, if that sort of thing had gone on, what a fortune she would have made! Myra assented eagerly, and the very next day made Alice, much against her will, accompany her to the top of the house, where a large attic was given up to the stowage of unused furniture and other articles. Here, as she told in a mysterious whisper, she had once picked up an old thimble which turned out to be real gold, and for which her papa sent her a sovereign from London. Who could say how many more might be lying about somewhere? Alice could not answer the question; and, though grudging the lights and shadows she was losing, good-humouredly indulged the poor child's whim—her own curiosity being repaid by finding several dusty paintings, some with tarnished frames, and others not framed at all. Among these last was an unfinished figure of a young girl carrying a tray, as if in imitation of the famous "*Belle Chocolatière*," and something in the face interested her, she knew not why.

"Who is this, Myra—do you know?" she asked, after pondering over it in silence.

"That?" said Myra, looking up from an old box she was diligently examining. "Oh, she was a thief. She robbed grandmamma of one of her jewels."

"What, a diamond?"

"I suppose so. It must have been worth a great deal of money, for grandmamma can't bear to speak of it. I wish I knew where it was, because it would be mine, you know."

"What became of the thief, my dear?"

"I don't know, and I don't care. It doesn't much signify; she was only a servant—quite a poor person."

"Only!" thought Alice, as her mind flew back to the dingy London parish, where she had heard the poor estimated at so different a value. "I wonder," she said presently, "if I might sketch the face?"

"Why? Do you think you could make some money with it?"

"I might, if it were worked up into a good picture."

"Then if you will give me something in gold, I will give you leave to copy it, for everything here is mine," said Myra, so decidedly that Alice supposed it must be true. She readily agreed to the terms, provided Myra could wait till the money was made; and then had no scruples in securing two or three clever studies of the nameless

thief, whose features had singularly taken her fancy. Of course she intended naming the subject to Mrs. Salisbury; but being fully occupied all the rest of the day, it escaped her memory for the time.

That evening, some intimate friends of her hostess, who were staying at the Rectory, came in to tea; and Alice Kerr was asked, as a favour, to show them some of her sketches. She never objected to this, being aware that they were often superior to her more finished works; and one of the visitors being a sufficiently good judge to make her criticisms worth having, she was listening to her remarks with anxious interest, when the other, an elderly lady, who had hitherto said but little on the subject, happening to look over her sister's shoulder, suddenly exclaimed, "My dear! I have seen that face before. Dear me, how wonderfully like ——"

There was an awkward pause. The younger sister glanced inquiringly at Alice, who reddened, and began to stammer an explanation: which Myra's decided tones cut short.

"I gave her leave to copy the face. That is the thief who stole the jewel."

Mrs. Salisbury, who had not been attending to what was going on, turned quickly round, with an expression in her face that Alice never forgot. "What are you speaking of?" she asked, and without waiting for an answer, held out her hand for the sketch-book. It was given to her in silence, but Alice noted that the elder visitor moved quietly to her friend's side and laid her hand on her shoulder. She herself, feeling guilty of she knew not what, except that it was a blunder, tried to apologise, but could not get out the words, and nobody seemed to heed the attempt. After a long and silent examination of the studies, Mrs. Salisbury calmly observed that Miss Kerr excelled in those bold outlines, and ought to be a mistress of portrait painting in time. She handed back the sketch-book to her friend, and nothing more was said; the visitors talked of other matters, and Alice's cheeks had time to regain their natural tint and temperature.

That something was wrong she was sure, but evidently she was not to be enlightened; though she could not help fancying, from the look one of the ladies gave her, that she was more than half inclined to be communicative. Mrs. Salisbury, however, gave them no opportunity; and, after their departure, retired so early that Alice could not find a moment for the apology she felt to be due. So all she could do was to confide in Grace, and beg her to find out the true facts of the story.

Grace shook her head. "It seems to me, Miss Kerr, almost a sin to keep jewels like that in a house where there is no gentleman. Many is the poor soul that has been lost just because people would put temptation in the way; and Madam has had more than one fright about her diamonds already. It frightens me whenever I see that box opened. I shall be right thankful when we've done with it, and are safe out of the house."

It was seldom that Grace spoke so energetically, and Alice was rather amused by her want of courage. But the words came back to her mind the next day under circumstances that rather tried her own.

She was at work, as usual, in the library. Myra was in better spirits, her papa having promised that her nugget should be made into a trinket for her watch-chain—and she was calculating how long it would take, and wondering when she should find another. The day had been very close, and the window had been opened, as it would have been much oftener if it had not been for Myra's health. Alice had risen, from a sense of duty, to shut it again, when she heard steps on the gravel below. It was so seldom anyone came that way that she looked out to see who it was, and then heard a sound which made her start. But the next moment she felt half ashamed of having done so—it seemed so ridiculous and so unlikely! She listened again, straining her ears to the utmost, and after a few moments of doubt was convinced that the same sound was repeated. A nervous tremor ran through her frame—it was impossible to go on drawing.

"Myra," she said, suddenly, laying down her pencil, "when are you going to show me how to dig for gold?"

"Never; it would take away my luck," said Myra, gravely.

"Not at all, if we tried in a fresh place. If only we had Mr. Martin here, he would tell us all about it."

"I'll send Richard to fetch him—or suppose I go myself? Then he'd be sure to come."

Alice had heard Mrs. Salisbury more than once regret her granddaughter's reluctance to take exercise, and therefore did not hesitate to encourage the notion. As soon as the child had left the room she rang the bell twice—the appointed signal for Grace Pyne.

"Oh, Grace!" she exclaimed, as her attendant entered, "I laughed at you last night, and I am as bad as you to-day. Come and help me to get these precious things under lock and key; and it is the last time I will be left in charge of them. That I declare."

"What is the matter, Miss Kerr?"

"Matter? Some one is prowling round the house, and must have seen them if he looked in; that's the matter. Unless there are two men in the world who cough exactly in the same odd way, it is the person I saw in France, and heard in the mission chapel."

Grace caught hold of the table. "You heard him, you say, Miss Kerr?"

"Yes, near the window. He is gone now, of course. I said nothing to Miss Strahan, but she is going to ask Martin to call, and I shall ask him if I ought to caution Mrs. Salisbury."

Grace Pyne made no further remark. She assisted in restoring the room to its usual state, and then hurried to her chamber, seized bonnet and shawl, and went out in quest of the mysterious sound.

The first person she met was old Richard, very cross at being disturbed at his potting, very angry with Miss Strahan for going out, and still more so with his mistress for having left her at home. On being asked if he had seen anyone about the premises, he replied that he saw too many to please him every day of his life; he had been telling a London constable (who had hurt himself on the line) that they wanted more police in the country, to keep idlers out of kitchen and larder. Where was he gone? Oh, down the nut walk—looking for nuts, may be—never was a cockney yet as knew one month from another. And, refreshed by this sarcasm at the querist's expense, Richard went off to the stable, leaving Grace to do as she pleased. At first she hesitated; a London police officer could have nothing to do with her; but the ever-present fear prevailed, and with a beating heart she turned into the nut walk: a cool and pleasant retreat in summer, but at this early season somewhat damp and chill. At every step she glanced eagerly on either side; but nothing appeared. The walk, which was straight and narrow, terminated in a summer house, with a fountain before it, and behind it a gate leading into the wood. On that gate leaned a man, with his hand in a sling, apparently waiting her approach.

It was no longer Mr. Jones—hair, eyebrows, complexion, dress, were all different, and his eyes were hidden by blue spectacles; but when he took these off, their first glance at her was enough. He held out his left hand, and she could not but clasp it in both hers, even while she whispered, "Oh, why are you come here—and like this?"

"To show you what a hold you have on my heart, dear girl. A poor fellow has no chance; if you will run away he must come after you, even with only one hand to use, and think himself lucky he has both his legs to march with."

"Your hand is hurt—you told the old man it was on the railway—that was not true," said Grace, too much agitated to respond to the compliment.

He smiled sarcastically. "No, my dear, it was not; but we don't tell everybody our family matters. I may tell *you* that it was done by a sort of relation, who shook hands with me just a bit too hard. I owe him one for it, which I'll pay some fine day."

"It was you, then, that Joel caught in Mr. Bruce's room?"

"Well—and what of that, Grace? Why was I there, do you think?"

"Oh, don't ask me—don't make me say—it is so dreadful to me! What could you be doing there that was right for an honest man?"

"What did I tell you from the first? Were you not to trust me, and ask no questions? What I was doing then is just what I am doing now—trying to clear my own name, and set wrong right. That's my errand, and I mean to carry it through, no matter what people think. I did hope my own brave girl would stick to me

through it all, and lend me a hand when I wanted it; but she's too afraid of the gentlefolks and the gossips, and she wouldn't even dip her handkerchief in the cold water to comfort this aching arm of mine, which drives me nearly mad. There, never mind—I'll get the old woman at home to do it," he went on, turning away as if to depart. But Grace stood between him and the gate, and made him sit down on a bench while she loosened his bandage.

"Ah," she said, as she bathed his wrist with water, and tied her handkerchief round it, "if the aching of my heart could cure your hand, Darch, you wouldn't be troubled with it long. It's no peace or rest I get night or day with thinking of you—and being obliged to misdoubt you, when I long to trust. Though you tell it me yourself, I can hardly bear to believe it—did you set the place on fire?"

He shook his head.

"But you were there, in that dress, so you must have known. Oh, Darch, how can a name be cleared by such doings as these?"

"Wait till they succeed—all depends on that. I am fighting for us both; and when all is fairly won, you will own you did me wrong. But if you are tired of it, you've but to go to the nearest magistrate and give information. I promise you I shan't run away."

"Darch, tell me the plain truth—had you anything to do with that attack on Mr. Bruce?"

"No. I never mean to hurt a hair of his head—unless I am forced in self-defence. He does not deserve much consideration from me, but, for your sake, I'll forget all that. You'd better not put questions that you might have to answer some day yourself."

"Then what are you hunting him for? You are the man they call Wily Wilkins, are you not?"

"Yes, I am; and they shall find I deserve the name before they've done with me; but wily does not stand for wicked, Grace. Don't you be frightened; I am full of tricks and dodges to carry my point, but I'm not so black as I'm painted; and for everything I'm doing now I've got a gentleman, looked up to and respected, to back me up. What do you say to that?"

"I can't understand it—I can't make you out. I only know that if you were getting an honest living by the hardest of hard work, I could bless God for his mercy, and pray for a blessing on what you did; but while you go on as you are doing now, all I can beg of Him, night and day, is that He will stand in the way before you and turn you back!"

She turned from him as she spoke and hurried home as if she could trust herself no further. He watched her disappearing figure till he could see it no more, and then slowly rose to depart in the opposite direction; a vague superstitious dread having seized him at her last words.

"The luck does somehow go against us; I can't think how, unless it is her doing. If that's all she can do for a fellow with her

prayers, he'd as lief she let him alone : aye, and she'll have to, if it goes on. If I thought——”

Here his musings were cut short by an approaching step from the wood, and Mrs. Salisbury opened the gate.

His hat was instantly in his hand, and his civil speeches were ready to explain his presence. He had not meant to intrude, but had missed his way, and felt a little faint from the pain of his accident. Mrs. Salisbury accepted the apology, and offered him refreshment, but this he gratefully declined. The lady's goodness was talked of in all the neighbourhood, and now he could bear witness to the fact. He wished he might ever have the opportunity of doing her a service. And, with another low bow, he was passing on, when she asked him where he was lodging.

“At a cottage belonging to an old woman—one of the oldest I ever saw, ma'am—gives one an idea how healthy your climate must be. The name is Cheveril, I think. She has other lodgers besides me.”

“Ah, indeed ! Yes, I know Mrs. Cheveril, and her cottage. That is your nearest way, sir.”

And with a civil bow of dismissal she moved on, her brow clouded, and her head slightly depressed, as if painful recollections had been stirred within. So absorbed became she in her thoughts that the time passed unheeded ; and it was not till a sense of oppression in the atmosphere recalled her grand-daughter to her recollection—Myra being always terrified by a thunderstorm—that she at last returned to the house. On entering the library she was surprised to find the drawing materials put away, and Alice enjoying a book ; nor did the explanation that Myra was gone out for a drive at all mend the matter.

“She had her walk this morning, and decided not to go out again. The weather is changing, and I am afraid we are going to have a storm. What put this into her head ?”

“I am afraid I did,” said Alice, “but I could not think of anything else, and I wanted to lock up the diamonds. Here is the key. I really think now we can finish the picture without them.”

Mrs. Salisbury took the key, but still looked dissatisfied.

“Why were you so anxious to-day, may I ask ?”

Alice explained. Adding, with a blush : “After what I had heard of your being robbed once before, I really felt frightened, and could not go on drawing. I am very sorry if I have vexed you. I wanted to say so last night.”

Mrs. Salisbury sighed, but more in sadness than displeasure. “You meant no harm, my dear, and I thank you for your precaution. It is true I was robbed once—and heavily. But that has been long forgiven, and the blame was not all on one side—the temptation was great, and ought not to have been there. You must not quite believe all poor Myra tells you.”

"I see I was wrong to copy the picture without your leave. Shall I tear it out of my book?"

"No, no—only be tender in your use of it. Spare the dead: at least, till you know more. Some day I may be able to tell it you; I cannot now." She paused to recover her voice, and then walked to the window. "You heard the step and the peculiar cough just here? I do not think we need be uneasy. I met the person who alarmed you—I am much more anxious about that dear child. There! did you see that flash? Oh, if she would but come home!"

But all her wishes, and all Alice's remorse for her contrivance, were futile at present. The storm, which had been gathering its strength all day, was now breaking upon them with a fury not very usual so early in the year, and every crash and blaze made the young artist so miserable that her hostess's courtesy compelled her to disguise her own sensations. She assured her penitent guest that Richard set about equal value on his young lady, Punch, and his precious self; and as they had not returned before the storm began, it was morally certain they were all taking shelter. And so it proved. But it seemed a very long time to both before the listened-for wheels were heard, and Myra made her appearance, safe and sound, and in excellent spirits, full of some new idea almost too big for utterance.

They had just reached Lowlevels, meaning to leave a message only, when the clouds grew so black that Richard made her get out and go into the house, while he put up the carriage. Mr. Martin was very kind and amusing, gave her brown bread and cream, and made Settler show off all the funny tricks he had taught him. But, best of all, he had taught her something too. He and Bob Medland had been playing a game, and when the lightning began to flash, and she cried, he had shut all the shutters, lighted the candles, and showed her how they did it, and then played with her himself, and she won this—showing a gold seven-shilling piece, which he said he had had for years. "It was much nicer than digging, wasn't it? You could do it indoors, whenever you liked, without dirtying your hands, and Martin said that people sometimes won thousands of pounds in that way."

"And did he not say they sometimes lost all they had?" asked her grandmother, prudently refraining from any display of feeling on the subject, which would only stamp it deeper on the infirm brain.

"No, he did not say anything about losing."

"But somebody must lose if the other is to win."

"Then I hope I shall always be the other. I asked Richard about it, and he said I had better ask my papa. So I shall, directly. He will send me down some pretty cards and counters; and you will play with me, Miss Kerr, won't you? Martin is coming to-morrow, and he'll show you how."

They promised whatever she wished—there was nothing else to be done; but the misery in the poor grandmother's face that evening

made Alice's heart ache. What could Martin have been thinking of—and, still worse, what could he himself be about, that his leisure should be thus employed?

CHAPTER XXIV.

HOW SIR JESSE CRITICISED THE PICTURE.

Mrs. Carroll to Alice Kerr.

"WELL, my dear Alice, the great event is over, and I have just returned from seeing the steamer depart which conveys the happy pair across the Channel. After sundry changes of purpose, they decided on France, and I trust the sea of to-day may be a good omen for their married life. It was a very odd wedding; we all looked at and thought much more about the bridegroom than the bride; and the couple themselves seemed to think more of the service than of themselves or each other. They might have been two of* old Bunyan's pilgrims, setting out on their journey, rather than a gentleman and a lady in easy circumstances, who may do pretty much as they please, Sundays and working-days. In this case, Christiana is quite as ready as her husband, and I wouldn't be the giant in her way that laid a finger on Gabriel. Meek and peaceable as I am myself, I think even I could fight for that dear fellow; and I could tell you why, but I won't. I only know that I mean, by hook or by crook, to get that sketch of him from Helen Ford, which you stole first, and she afterwards. Talking of Helen Ford, I wonder whether you have yet heard the last news. If you have heard nothing, be discreet; but it cannot be a secret long to those around you, for everybody here knows that she is to be the second Lady Strahan. They were very friendly about you, offering to take you with them, to meet the Bruces in Paris, or elsewhere; but of course you know that your head-quarters are with us, whenever you are not specially engaged. I shall want comforting, as I am to lose my dear old nurse, who only waits for the second wedding to-morrow before starting for Lowlevels, where, I suppose, Grace Pyne will join her, to get all ready. We go home to-morrow, as Hartley has a great deal to do—and I almost think he means to do it."

[Finished by Hartley Carroll, two days later.]

"Almost, indeed! I have not only to do my own work, but to finish hers. Here we are in London, and this letter has never been sent. Now I can tell you for your comfort that your great patron is going down to see how you are getting on, and perhaps to sit to you himself. How I envy you!"

Letters were not delivered at Highlevels till after breakfast, and Alice Kerr always read hers in the library. She was still in all the flutter of excitement caused by the thought of being again with

Gabriel and Edith, as well as of the startling news both her correspondents conveyed, when Mrs. Salisbury came in, also with a letter in her hand.

"It is as well our picture is finished, Miss Kerr, for Sir Jesse writes that he will be with us this evening."

"Yes, I heard he was coming," stammered Alice.

"You did? And you may have heard, too, that some other friends of yours are going abroad soon, and hope to carry you away with them."

"Miss Ford is no particular friend of mine—only of Edith and Clare."

"Allow me to observe that to be their friend is a recommendation in itself. Is she at all like Mrs. Bruce?"

"Like Edith? As unlike as fog is to sunshine. Where Edith would say or do something to help you on, Miss Ford would just throw you back. She doesn't seem to me to believe in or care about anything."

"You are too young to judge, my dear, how little people's words sometimes really mean on such subjects. I trust you are mistaken."

"If she doesn't mean it she shouldn't say it; but I do not want to speak against her. She was very good-natured to me, and Edith loves her too. I beg your pardon for saying what I did."

Mrs. Salisbury smiled a little bitterly. She saw that the news was no secret, which had come like a thunderclap to herself.

"I may depend on your discretion, Miss Kerr," she said, hurriedly, "not to mention the lady's name to Myra at present. All that is right for her to know her father will tell her. We must try and keep her in good spirits against his arrival. I shall miss your help sadly. If all Mrs. Bruce's friends are as amiable——"

She could not finish her sentence, but bending over her young guest she kissed her forehead; and left her so touched and gratified that she could have undertaken anything, however tiresome, to do her a pleasure.

Certainly it required some such motive to be indulgent to Myra's last fancy, and sit down on a bright warm morning to play odd and even for postage-stamps, the highest stake which Mrs. Salisbury would allow, and of which her grand-daughter had already accumulated a handsome store. The more distressed the elder lady looked at the weird spectacle, the more the younger tried to appear as though she liked it; and, indeed, Myra decidedly preferred Alice's companionship to that of anyone else. She often said that Alice must stay with her altogether; and when she was told her papa was expected, nodded her head significantly, intimating that he would settle it all in a minute.

"I am always lucky in playing with you: and pence, papa says, grow into pounds in time—don't they, Miss Kerr? You don't mind losing your stamps, do you?"

Alice minded nothing, with the bright prospect now before her of her holiday trip—so unlike her old experiences of Continental journeying—the society of Gabriel and Edith, and the life she was to lead with them afterwards. If only her picture gave satisfaction! But she was artist enough to feel, now it was finished, that it might have been much better done; yet if she touched it again she should probably spoil it altogether. Much would depend on her patron's humour; and a man who could admire Edith, as she was sure he did, and then marry Miss Ford, must have such peculiar ideas that you could not foretell what he would say or think.

Their sixth game was just over, and Alice was smothering an immense yawn, when relief appeared in the announcement of a visit from Martin, who had brought a note for Miss Kerr. Myra jumped up in delight, desired he might be admitted directly, and seized on him as he entered to tell him her great news. Her papa was coming to dinner, and would play with her himself—for gold. Would Martin show her how to manage so that she was sure to win?

"If I lost any of my gold, I don't know what I should do, you know."

"It is awkward, my little lady," said he, with the gentle compassion he always showed in speaking to her, "but those who play must learn to lose in their turn."

"Do *you* ever lose when you play?"

"Indeed I do. To tell you the truth, I have nearly made up my mind that I can't afford to play any more."

"I am so glad," murmured Alice, looking up from her note, and fixing her eyes on his.

"Glad that I have been losing?"

"Yes, if it stops you in time. Don't be angry, but I have seen men so miserable over their cards, I do wish you would let them alone."

"You care about my being miserable?"

"Did you not care when I was so? Few people have been more wretched than I felt for those few minutes, before you came to my help. I should be most ungrateful if I forgot it."

He made her a little bow, but remained silent. Myra, who was collecting the cards together, looked at them both with a puzzled expression, as if she did not quite take in what they were saying. She was still brooding over the idea that playing for gold was expensive.

"I will write a line to Mrs. Ellis," said Alice, turning to the other table, "if you will kindly take charge of it."

She sat down to write, and he came behind her chair, and after a pause began in a low tone to excuse his having put the cards into the poor child's head. She seemed so terrified by the storm, he could think of nothing else to amuse her; and it had completely distracted her attention.

"And her head ever since," said Alice, petulantly; "but you meant

t for the best. I was only dismayed to hear that the cards were here. I hate the very sight of them!"

"You are quite right—at this moment I feel that I do. But their purpose is answered, and I shall not want them any more."

Alice looked up inquiringly. It was curious, as she thought afterwards, how completely they seemed to understand each other, and to feel that each deserved confidence—but it came so naturally that they were intimate before they were aware. In reply to her look, he informed her that he had expected Medland would be used as a tool, and had humoured him as an experiment. He was satisfied now that he received suggestions from outside.

"He tried hard to make me play at first, by flattering hints about my luck; and at last I made out that some one had told him of my skill at cards. Now I had not touched one since I came to Europe, so that could only have reached him through somebody who knew me before. I let him think I was taken in; and his play has suddenly become so artful, I know he has been taught a trick or two, and I mean to learn where."

"Then I was not wrong. It was Wily Wilkins I heard!"

"When? Where?"

Alice explained: the more easily that Myra, hearing her grandmother pass, had just run out of the room. Martin listened with keen interest, and decidedly took her view of the matter.

"Your quick wit is a treasure to us," he said. "That is the man Bob talked of, and who is using him for his own ends. If he be our enemy, all right; so long as he is here the captain is safe, and Joel will come soon to strengthen the garrison."

"You shall have Grace Pyne at once. I have told Mrs. Ellis that I do not want a maid, and if Mrs. Salisbury approves, she can go to-morrow."

They stayed a little while after this had been settled, talking over their absent friends, and comparing accounts of the wedding, till Myra's return. A thought struck Martin, and he met her with an air of mystery which arrested her at once.

"Come, my little lady," he said, "I am going to show you something better than a game—something that everybody cannot do, though some people have made money by it. Lend me those cards."

He proceeded to show her one or two simple conjuring tricks, familiar to all who have seen such exhibitions, but new to Myra; who, as he expected, wanted to learn how they were done. What surprised him, however, was the wonderful aptitude she displayed for acquiring the art, as if legerdemain had been her natural gift; he could not help remarking that she would have been a fortune to her father if his profession had been that of Houdin.

"I'll tell him what you say," cried Myra, triumphantly. And after his departure she went on practising her new art, till Alice could not

refrain from sketching her, as she sat, for a picture to be called "The Juggler's Child."

It did not escape her notice that her kind hostess was in a state of unwonted restlessness and excitement, wandering from room to room, and ringing the bell much oftener than was necessary. The Rector and Dr. Nelson had been invited to meet Sir Jesse: and Alice persuaded Mrs. Salisbury to let her sit with Myra during dinner and keep her amused—an offer which, though it jarred on the good lady's sense of hospitality, excited her warm gratitude.

"If I can ever do you a service, I will, my dear, you may depend upon it," she said more than once; and Alice felt sure she meant what she said, though she did not know how soon it would be tested.

Sir Jesse came. To all appearance his mother-in-law had recovered her quiet dignity, and his reception was all that could be required on either side. Alice kept the child happy while they were at dinner, with an interminable tale of treasure-finding, borrowed on the spur of the moment from sources of various kinds; and thus contrived to keep down her own private nervousness about the criticisms that would be made on her picture. Sir Jesse, she was told, had seen and commended it highly, but had something to say about it which he would himself explain. When he did come into the drawing-room with the other gentlemen, he was particularly courteous to Alice, thanked her for her goodness to his child, talked in the most friendly manner of their mutual acquaintance, Miss Ford, and then turned the general attention to her picture.

The two guests were ready with their commendations. The Canon was, as he said, no judge of art, but knew a likeness when he saw it; Dr. Nelson appreciated all the cleverness displayed, and good-naturedly held his tongue about the drawing; but neither was prepared for the critique of the great authority. He objected to the treatment of the jewels—in his opinion the reflected light should have been differently handled; and he was morally certain that if they could obtain a hint or two from a first-rate artist it would be of incalculable service to Miss Kerr. His object was to have the picture seen as soon as possible, so as to secure for her the advantage of the London season; but in these cases it was most important that her first piece should not be found with a defect which every critic would feel bound to notice. Of course, at that time of the year, every artist was either in London already, or rushing thither; and one whom he knew well, and who would be a sound authority on the doubtful point, would, he was sure, insist on seeing the model exactly as she sat.

"In that case," said Dr. Nelson, "there is nothing for it but to take her up to town with her likeness, diamonds and all."

"Ah!" said Sir Jesse, shaking his head, and suppressing a sigh, "but there is some one else to be considered: and it would, I fear, be asking her too much."

All eyes turned on Mrs. Salisbury, who did not, at first, appear to apprehend her son-in-law's meaning. He soon made it clear by addressing his daughter, asking her if she would not like to go to London, and see all the shops, and drive in the parks, and choose her own dresses for the summer? Then she must coax grandmamma to bring her up to him for a visit, and to bring the diamonds with her, that people might see if the picture were really like.

The blood mounted into Mrs. Salisbury's cheeks for a moment, as her grand-daughter turned to urge the request; and Alice, who read in her face the repugnance to comply, ventured to interpose, offering to paint the likeness over again, rather than give Mrs. Salisbury so much trouble. Sir Jesse smiled, and observed that would not be quite the same to him.

"But we will not press the subject now," he said, pleasantly; "these things take a little time to consider and arrange. Myra, my dear, you said you had something to show me. What is it?"

"I meant to show you a game," said Myra; "but Martin says you can't always win without cheating, so he taught me some tricks instead; and if you were a conjuror I should make your fortune. I should like to make your fortune, papa."

"Would you, my dear?" said he, caressing her more tenderly than usual, for it was the first time he had ever heard her wish to do anything for him at all.

"Yes—because it would all be mine, you know."

He pressed his stern lips together, and withdrew his hand from her hair.⁸ "Show me how you would make my fortune."

The child sprang up in a moment, and went through her little performance with a skill which the other gentlemen applauded good-humouredly, but which brought no smile to her father's face. He only observed, with marked emphasis, that her education seemed to be falling into good hands; and changed the subject by producing some little presents from London. Among these was a pretty gold locket, which he told her, with a significant smile, was a keepsake from a lady who was longing to see her. The child's curiosity being excited, he took her on his knee; and went on whispering such messages and explanations as he thought she could appreciate, and wound up by inquiring what she would say if she saw the kind giver of the locket she admired so much. Myra pondered a moment, then her eyes brightened with the happy thought: "I should say that I wanted a gold chain to wear with it!"

"Ah!" said he, a little disconcerted, but without losing his presence of mind, "that is just what she expected; and when your dear grandmamma brings you to London, the gold chain will be ready for you to put on."

He had clenched the matter now, for Myra had quite made up her mind, and when she wished her grandmother good-night, told her, point-blank, that she was going to have a new mamma, who would

give her beautiful presents; and when she went to London she was to have a new gold chain for her locket. Mrs. Salisbury did not contradict her, and her son-in-law tacitly accepted the victory, exerting himself for the rest of the evening to make an impression on his listeners with anecdotes of the art-world—of his own experience as a patron and connoisseur, and of the failure, from want of taking his advice, of more than one ambitious candidate for fame.

Dr. Nelson took an opportunity of sitting down in a quiet corner with his hostess, and expressing his fear that she was worried by the idea of the journey. She owned that she shrank from the exertion, and dreaded the effect on Myra, but that she hardly felt justified in opposing Sir Jesse's express desire. She could not help wishing now that the diamonds had been left out of the picture.

"To tell you the truth," said the doctor, with a sagacious nod, "I am very glad the diamonds are going to have London advice. Unless I am much mistaken some of them want it."

"My dear doctor!"

"Ah, you laughed at me before, when I hinted as much. But never mind; take them with you, by all means, and get them looked at by a first-rate jeweller. If he says they are all right, I will apologise, and (which is more difficult) own myself mistaken."

"It would be a serious matter if they were not, considering that they have been valued more than once, and have been under lock and key for years. But I begin to think they might be safer at a banker's, and doubt very much whether I shall bring them back—even if I convey them safely thither."

"You need have no fear of that, if report speaks truth—that you saved them once single-handed."

"I was younger then, and I could see my robber; but the thieves I dread are those whom I cannot see. I would have risked more than I did to save poor Cheveril."

"Cheveril? Was he any relation of the poor old woman, down in the Combe, where the Medlands are lodging?"

"He was her grandson. Have you seen her lately?"

"I was sent for to her this afternoon—she is sinking fast."

"Why did they not let me know? I will drive over to-morrow, and take her some wine."

"Then stay with her while she drinks it, for I would not trust my worthy tenants with a teaspoonful. If it had not been for Erasmus Martin, she might have died this afternoon. He sent Bob to fetch me, and I found him pouring broth and brandy down her throat to keep her alive."

"What, Bruce's Australian?" said Sir Jesse, who had come nearer to them than they were aware; "what mischief could he have been after, to take him there?"

"Why should he be after mischief, Sir Jesse?"

"Simply because he was brought up to it: a gambling, desperate

sort of fellow, whom I should not care to quarrel with in a dark lane. I hope you have not shown *him* your diamonds, my dear madam?"

Before Mrs. Salisbury could answer, Richard came in to say the doctor was wanted.

"Who is here, Richard?" asked he, concealing the reluctance with which he rose from his comfortable seat.

"It's a London constable, he calls himself, who is lodging at the Combe, with the Medlands, sir. He is staying here to recover from an accident, I believe."

"The same I saw here one day," said Mrs. Salisbury; "he seemed intelligent, but rather too smooth spoken, I thought. Dr. Nelson, if your gig is here, you will not mind taking a basket with you?"

She hurried out to collect a few comforts for the sick woman, while the gentlemen consulted together; the Canon deciding to accompany his friend, and Sir Jesse taking out his purse to contribute a trifle, observing she was an old acquaintance. He went into the hall with them to hear the last report of the messenger; and the latter, when summoned, did not perceive him at first. While they were waiting for Mrs. Salisbury's basket, the Canon asked him about a robbery lately committed on the line, and if it were true that there was a new trick by which a dressing-box had been spirited away under the very eyes of the owners, by dropping over it a leather case, apparently strapped and directed. He believed it was true that the thing had been done, but not so easily as people thought.

"No," said Sir Jesse, "those tricks require real cleverness, and are generally highly paid."

The man turned at the sound of his voice, and was about to speak, but was suddenly seized with a fit of coughing, and retreated to recover himself. Dr. Nelson, following to see if he could relieve him, found Bilson, Myra's maid, administering a cup of milk, which she explained did him more good than anything.

"Oh, you know him, do you? Well, if he will call on me to-morrow, I'll see what I can do for his cough. It is enough to tear him to pieces. Here comes the basket. Now my dear sir, we must be off."

As they drove away on their errand of mercy, Sir Jesse walked to the hall door, and looked out with a longing gaze. "It is a fine night," he observed; "I'll take a turn myself before going to bed."

He lighted a cigar, and strolled along the gravel walk until he detected the figure of the disabled constable coming slowly round from the back entrance. In a few strides he was by his side:

"Darch Williams, you have failed me so far, but I will try you once more. The tide of luck is turning; and I am going to give you such a chance as may never occur again."

(To be continued.)

A DAY IN BRIAR WOOD.

THAT day, and its events, can never go out of my memory. There are epochs in life that lie upon the heart for ever, marking the past like stones placed for retrospect. They may be of pleasure, or they may be of pain; but there they are, in that great store-field locked up within us, to be recalled at will as long as life shall last.

It was in August, and one of the hottest days of that hot month. A brilliant day: the sun shining with never a cloud to soften it, the sky intensely blue. Just the day for a picnic, provided you had shade.

Shade we had. Briar Wood abounds in it. For the towering trees are dark, and their foliage thick. Here and there the wood opens, and you come upon the sweetest little bits of meadow-land scenery that a painter's eye could desire. Patches of green glade smooth enough for fairy revels; undulating banks draped with ferns and fragrant with sweet wild flowers; dells dark and dim to roam in and fancy yourself out of the world.

Briar Wood belonged to Sir John Whitney. It was of a good length but narrow, terminating at one end in the entangled coppice which we had dashed through that long-past day when we played at hare and hounds; and poor Charles Van Rheyn had died, in that same coppice, of the running. The other and best end, up where these lonely glades lie sheltered, extends itself nearly to the lands pertaining to Vale Farm—if you have not forgotten that place. The wood was a rare resort for poachers and gipsies, as well as picnic parties, and every now and again Sir John would declare that it should be rooted up.

We were staying at Whitney Hall. Miss Deveen was there on a visit (Cattledon included, of course), and Sir John wrote over to invite us for a few days to meet her: the Squire and Mrs. Todhetley, I and Tod. And, there we were, enjoying ourselves like anything.

It was Sir John himself who proposed the picnic. He called it a gipsy-party: indeed, the word "picnic" had hardly come in then. The weather was so hot indoors that Sir John thought it might be an agreeable change to live a day in the open air; and lie in the shade and look up at the blue sky through the flickering trees. So the cook was told to provide fowls and ham and pigeon pies, with apple puffs, salads, and creams.

"The large carriage and the four-wheeled chaise shall take the ladies," observed Sir John, "and I daresay they can make room for me and the Squire amidst them; it's a short distance, and we shan't mind a little crowding. You young men can walk."

So it was ordained. The carriages started, and we after them, William and Henry Whitney disputing as to which was the best route to take: Bill holding out for that by Goose Brook, Harry for that by the river. It ended in our dividing: I went with Bill his way; the rest of the young Whitneys and Tod the other, with Featherston's nephew; an overgrown young giant of seventeen, about six feet, who had been told he might come.

Barring the heat, it was a glorious walk; just as it was a glorious day. Passing Goose Brook (a little stream meandering through the trees, with a rustic bridge across it: though why it should hold that name I never knew) we soon came to the coppice end of the wood.

"Now," said Bill to me, "shall we plunge into the wood at once, and so onwards right through it; or skirt round by the Granary?"

"The wood will be the shadiest."

"And pleasantest. I'm not at all sure, though, Johnny, that I shan't lose my way in it. It has all kinds of bewildering tricks and turnings."

"Never mind if you do. We can find it again."

"We should have been safe to meet some of those Leonards had we gone by the Granary," observed Bill, as we turned into the wood, where just at present the trees were thin, "and they might have been wanting to join us, pushing fellows that they are! I don't like them."

"Who are the Leonards? Who were they before they came here?"

"Old Leonard made a mint of money in India, and his sons are spending it for him as fast as they can. One day when he was talking to my father, he hinted that he had taken this remote place, the Granary, and brought them down here, to get them out of the fast lives they were leading in London. He got afraid, he said."

"Have the sons no professions?"

"Don't seem to have. Or anything else that's good—money excepted."

"What do they do with their time?"

"Anything. Idle it away. Keep dogs, and shoot, and fish, and lounge and smoke, and—Halloa! look yonder, Johnny!"

Briar Wood had no straight and direct road through it; but plenty of small paths and byways and turnings and windings, that might bring you, by good luck, to landing at last; or might take you unconsciously back whence you came. Emerging from a part, where the trees grew dark and dense and thick, upon one of those delightful glades I spoke of before, we saw what I took to be a small gipsy encampment. A fire of sticks, with a kettle upon it, smoked upon the ground; beside it sat a young woman and child; a few tin wares, tied together, lay in a corner, and some rabbits skins were stretched out to dry on the branches of trees.

Up started the woman, and came swiftly towards us. A regular

gipsy with the purple-black hair, the yellow skin, and the large gleaming eyes. It was a beautiful young face, but worn and thin and anxious.

"Do you want your fortunes told, my good young gentlemen? I can——"

"Not a bit of it," interrupted Bill. "Go back to your fire. We are only passing through."

"I can read the lines of your hands unerringly, my pretty sirs. I can forewarn you of evil, and prepare you for good."

"Now look you here," cried Bill, turning upon her good-humouredly, as she followed us up with a lot of the like stuff, "I can forewarn *you* of it, unless you are content to let us alone. This wood belongs to Sir John Whitney, as I daresay all your fraternity know, and his keepers wage war against you when they find you are encamped here, and that I am sure you know. Mind your own affairs, and you may stay here in peace, for me: keep on bothering us, and I go straight to Rednal and give him a hint. I am Sir John's son."

He threw her a sixpence, and the woman's face changed as she caught it. The persuasive smile vanished as if by magic, giving place to a look of anxious pain. It struck Bill so greatly as to arrest him.

"What's the matter?"

"Do you know my husband, sir?" she asked. "It's more than likely that you do."

"And what if I do?" cried Whitney.

The woman took the words to be an affirmative answer. She drew near, and laid her small brown finger on his coat sleeve.

"Then, if you chance to meet him, sir, persuade him to come back to me for the love of heaven. I *can* read the future: and for some days past, since we first halted here, I have foreseen that evil is in store for him. He won't believe me; he is not one of *us*; but I scent it in the air, and it comes nearer and nearer; it is drawing very close now. He may listen to you, sir, for we respect Sir John, who is never hard on us as some are; and oh, send him back here to me and the child! Better that it should fall on him when by our side than away from us."

"Why—what do you mean?" cried Whitney, surprised out of the question, and hardly understanding her words or their purport. And he might have laughed outright, as he told me later, but for the dreadful trouble that shone forth from her sad, wild eyes.

"I don't know what I mean: it's hidden from me," she answered, taking the words in a somewhat different light from what he meant them. "I think it may be sudden sickness; or it may be evil trouble: whatever it is, it will end badly."

Whitney nodded to her, and we pursued our way. I had been looking at the little girl, who had drawn shyly up to gaze at us. She was fair as a lily, with a sweet face and eyes blue as the sky.

"What humbugs they are!" exclaimed Whitney, alluding to gipsies and tramps in general. "As to this one, I should say she's going off her head!"

"Do you know her husband?"

"Don't know him from Adam. Johnny, I hope that's not a stolen child! Fair as she is, she can't be the woman's: there's nothing of the gipsy in her composition."

"How well the gipsy speaks! With quite a refined accent."

"Gipsies often do, I've heard. Let us get on."

What with this adventure, and dawdling, and taking a wrong turn or two, it was past one o'clock when we got in, and they were laying the cloth for dinner. The green mossy glade, with the sheltering trees around, the banks and the dells, the ferns and wild flowers, made a picture of a retreat on a broiling day. The table (some boards, brought from the Hall, and laid on trestles) stood in the middle of the grass; and Helen and Anna Whitney, in their green and white muslins, were just as busy as bees placing the dishes upon it. Lady Whitney (with a face redder than beetroot) helped them: she liked to be always doing something. Miss Cattledon and the Mater were pacing the dell below, and Miss Deveen sat talking with the Squire and Sir John.

"Have they not got here?" exclaimed William.

"Have who not got here?" retorted Helen.

"Todhetley and the boys."

"Ages ago. They surmised that you two must be lost, stolen, or strayed."

"Then where are they?"

"Making themselves useful. Johnny Ludlow, I wish you'd go after them, and tell them of all things to bring a corkscrew. Nobody can find ours, and we think it is left behind."

"Why, here's the corkscrew, in my pocket," called out Sir John. "Whatever brings it there? And——What's that great thing, moving down to us?"

It was Tod with a wooden stool upon his head, legs upwards. Rednal the gamekeeper lived close by, and it was arranged that we should borrow chairs, and things, from his cottage.

We sat down to dinner at last—and a downright jolly dinner it was. Plenty of good things to eat, cider, lemonade, and champagne to drink: and everybody talking together, and bursts of laughter.

"Look at Cattledon!" cried Bill in my ear. "She is as merry as the rest of us."

So she was. A whole sea of smiles on her thin face. She wore a grey gown as genteel as herself, bands of black velvet round her pinched-in waist and long throat. Cattledon looked like vinegar in general, it's true; but I don't say she was bad at heart. Even she could be genial to-day, and the rest of us were off our head with jollity, the Squire's face and Sir John's beaming back at one another.

If we had but foreseen how pitifully the day was to end ! It makes me think of some verses I once learnt out of a Journal—Chambers's, I believe. The magazine goes on to me about "limited space," but I'll put them in here. It can but strike them out.

"There are twin Genii, who, strong and mighty,
Under their guidance mankind retain ;
And the name of the lovely one is Pleasure,
And the name of the loathly one is Pain.
Never divided, where one can enter
Ever the other comes close behind ;
And he who in Pleasure his thoughts would centre
Surely Pain in the search shall find !

Alike they are, though in much they differ—
Strong resemblance is 'twixt the twain ;
So that sometimes you may question whether
It can be Pleasure you feel, or Pain.
Thus 'tis, that whatever of deep emotion
Stirreth the heart—be it grave or gay,
Tears are the Symbol—from feeling's ocean
These are the fountains that rise to-day.

Should not this teach us calmly to welcome
Pleasure when smiling our hearths beside ?
If she be the substance, how dark the shadow ;
Close doth it follow, the near allied.
Or if Pain long o'er our threshold hover,
Let us not question but Pleasure nigh
Bideth her time her face to discover,
Rainbow of Hope in a clouded sky."

Yes, it was a good time. To look at us round that dinner table, you'd have said there was nothing but pleasure in the world. Not but that ever and anon the poor young gipsy woman's troubled face and her sad wild eyes would rise between me and the light.

The afternoon was getting on when I got back to the glade with William Whitney (for we had all gone strolling about after dinner) and found some of the ladies there. The Mater had gone into Rednal's cottage to talk to his wife, Jessy, and Anna was below in the dell. A clean-looking, stout old lady, in a light cotton gown and white apron, a mob cap with a big border and bow of ribbon in front of it, turned round from talking to them, smiled, and made me a curtsy.

The face seemed familiar to me : but where had I seen it before ? Helen Whitney, seeing my puzzled look, spoke up in her free manner.

"Have you no memory, Johnny Ludlow ? Don't you remember Mrs. Ness?—and the fortunes she told us on the cards ?"

It came upon me with a rush. That drizzling Good Friday afternoon at Miss Deveen's, long ago, and Helen smuggling up the

old lady from downstairs to tell her fortune. But what brought her here? There seemed to be no connection between Miss Deveen's house in town and Briar Wood in Worcestershire. I could not have been more at sea had I seen a Chinese lady from Peking. Miss Deveen laughed.

"And yet it is so easy of explanation, Johnny, so simple and straightforward. Mrs. Ness chances to be aunt to Rednal's wife, and she is staying down here with them."

Simple it was—as are most other puzzles when you get the clue. The old woman was a great protégée of Miss Deveen's, who had known her through her life of misfortune: but Miss Deveen did not before know of her relationship to Rednal's wife or that she was staying at their cottage. They had been talking of that past afternoon and the fortune-telling in it, when I and Bill came up.

"And what I told you, miss, came true—now didn't it?" cried Mrs. Ness to Helen.

"True! Why, you told me *nothing!*" retorted Helen. "There was nothing in the fortune. You said there was nothing in the cards."

"I remember it," said Mother Ness; "remember it well. The cards showed no husband for you then, young lady; they might tell different now. But they showed some trouble about it, I recollect."

Helen's face fell. There had indeed been trouble. Trouble again and again. Richard Foliott, the false, had brought it to her; and so did Charles Leafchild, now lying in his grave at Worcester: not to speak of poor Slingsby Temple. Helen had got over all those crosses now, and was looking up again. She was of a nature to look up again from whatever evil befell her, short of losing her head off her shoulders. All dinner time she had been flirting with Featherston's nephew.

This suggestion of Mrs. Ness, "the cards might tell different now," caught hold of her mind. Her colour slightly deepened, her eyes sparkled.

"Have you the cards with you now, Mrs. Ness?"

"Ay, to be sure, young lady. I never come away from home without my cards. They be in the cottage yonder."

"Then I should like my fortune told again."

"Oh, Helen, how can you be so silly!" cried Lady Whitney.

"Silly! Why, mamma, it is good fun. You go and fetch the cards, Mrs. Ness."

"I and Johnny nearly got our fortune told to day," put in Bill, while Mrs. Ness stood where she was, hardly knowing what to be at. "We came upon a gipsy woman in the wood, and she wanted to promise us a wife apiece. A little girl was with her that may have been stolen: she was too fair to be that brown woman's child."

"It must have been the Norths," exclaimed Mrs. Ness. "Was there some tinware by 'em, sir; and some rabbit skins?"

"Yes. Both. The rabbit skins were hanging out to dry."

"Ay, it's the Norths," repeated Mrs. Ness. "Rednal said he saw North yesterday, and guessed they'd lighted their camp fire not far off."

"Who are the Norths? Gipsies?"

"The wife is a gipsy, sir; born and bred. He is a native of these parts, and superior; but he took to an idle, wandering life, and married the gipsy girl for her beauty. She was Bertha Lee then."

"Why it is quite a romance," said Miss Deveen, amused.

"And so it is, ma'am. Rednal told me all on't. They tramp the country, selling their tins and collecting rabbit skins."

"And is the child theirs?" asked Bill.

"Ay, sir, it be. But she don't take after her mother; she's like him, her skin fair as alabaster. You'd not think, Rednal says, that she'd got a drop o' gipsy blood in her veins. North might ha' done well had he only turned out steady; been just the odds o' what he is—a poor tramp."

"Oh, come, never mind the gipsies," cried Helen, impatiently. "You go and bring the cards, Mrs. Ness."

One can't go in for stilts at a picnic, or wisdom either, and when Mrs. Ness brought her cards (which might have been cleaner) none of them made any objection; even Cattledon looked on, grimly tolerant.

"But you can't think there's anything in it—that the cards tell true," cried Lady Whitney to the old woman.

"Ma'am, be sure they do. I believe in 'em from my very heart. And so, I make bold to say, would everybody here believe, if they had read the things upon 'em that I've read, and seen how surely they've come to pass."

They would not contradict her openly; only smiled a little among themselves. Mother Ness was busy with the cards, laying them out for Helen's fortune. I drew near to listen.

"You look just as though you put faith in it," whispered Bill to me.

"I don't put faith in it. I should not like to be so foolish. But, William, what she told Helen before *did* come true."

Well, Helen's "fortune" was told again. It sounded just as uneventful as the one told that rainy afternoon long ago—for we were now some years older than we were then. Helen Whitney's future, according to the cards, or to Dame Ness's reading of them, would be all plain sailing, smooth and easy, and unmarked alike by events and by care. A most desirable career, some people would think, but Helen looked the picture of desolation.

"And you say I am not to be married!" she exclaimed.

Dame Ness had her head bent over the cards. She shook it without looking up.

"I don't see a ring nowhere, young lady, and that's the blessed truth. There *ain't* one; that's more. There ain't a sign o' one. Neither was there the other time, I remember: that time in London. And so—I take it that there won't never be."

"Then I think you are a very disagreeable, story-telling old woman!" flashed Helen, all candour in her mortification. "Not be married, indeed!"

"Why, my dear, I'd be only too glad to promise you a husband if the cards foretold it," said Dame Ness, pityingly. "Yours is the best fortune of all, though, if you could but bring your mind to see it. Husbands is more plague nor profit. I'm sure I had cause to say so by the one that fell to my share."

In high dudgeon Helen pushed the cards together. Mrs. Ness, getting some kind words from the rest of us, curtsied as she went off to the cottage to see about the kettles for our tea.

"You are a nice young lady!" exclaimed Bill. "Showing your temper because the cards don't give you a sweetheart!"

Helen threw her fan at him. "Mind your own business," retorted she. And he went away laughing.

"And, my dear, I say the same as William," added Lady Whitney. "One really might think that you were—were *eager* to be married."

"All cock-a-hoop for it," struck in Cattledon, speaking for Helen's benefit, and looking as prim as you please. "As the housemaids are."

"And no such great crime, either," returned Helen, defiantly. "Fancy that absurd old thing telling me I never should be!"

"Helen, my dear, I think the chances are that you will not be married," quietly spoke Miss Deveen.

"Oh—*do* you!"

"Don't be cross, Helen. Our destinies are not in our own hands."

Helen bit her lip, laughed, and recovered her temper. "She was like her father; apt to flash out a hot word, but never angry long."

"Now—please, Miss Deveen, *why* do you think I shall not be?" she asked playfully.

"Because, my dear, you have had three chances, so to say, of marriage, and each time it has been frustrated. In two of the instances by—if we may dare to say it—the interposition of Heaven. The young men died beforehand in an unexpected and unforeseen manner: Charles Leafchild and Mr. Temple——"

"I never was engaged to Mr. Temple," interrupted Helen.

"No; but, by all I hear, you shortly would have been."

Helen gave no answer. She knew perfectly well that she had expected an offer from Slingsby Temple; that his death, as she believed, alone prevented its being made. She'd have said Yes to it, too. Miss Deveen went on.

"We will not give more than an allusion to Captain Foliott; he

does not deserve it; but your marriage with him came nearest of all. It may be said, Helen, without exaggeration, that you have been on the point of marriage twice, and very nearly so a third time. Now what does this prove?"

"That luck was against me," said Helen, lightly.

"Ay, child: luck, as we call it in this world. I would rather say, Destiny. *God knows best.* Do you wonder that I have never married?" continued Miss Deveen in a less serious tone.

"I never thought about it," answered Helen.

"I know that some people have wondered at it; for I was a girl likely to marry—or it may be better to say, likely to be sought in marriage. I had good looks, good temper, good birth, and a good fortune: and I daresay I was just as willing to be chosen as all young girls are. Yes, I say that all girls possess an innate wish to marry; it is implanted in their nature, comes with their mother's milk. Let their station be high or low, a royal princess, if you will, or the housemaid Jemima Cattledon suggested but now, the same natural instinct lies within each—a wish to be a wife. And no reason, either, why they should not wish it; it's nothing to be ashamed of; and Helen, my dear, I would rather hear a girl avow it openly, as you do, than pretend to be shocked at its very mention."

Some gleams of sunlight flickered on Miss Deveen's white hair and fine features as she sat under the trees, her bronze-coloured silk gown falling around her in rich folds, and a big amethyst brooch fastening her collar. I began to think how good-looking she must have been when young, and where the eyes of the young men of those days could have been. Lady Whitney, looking like a bundle in her light dress that ill became her, sat near fanning herself.

"Yes, I do wonder, now I think of it, that you never married," said Helen.

"To tell you the truth, I wonder myself sometimes," replied Miss Deveen, smiling. "I think—I believe—that, putting other advantages aside, I was well calculated to be a wife, and should have made a good one. Not that *that* has anything to do with it; for you see the most incapable of women marry, and who remain incapable to their dying day. I could mention wives at this moment, within the circle of my acquaintance, who are no more fit to be wives than is that three-legged stool Johnny is balancing himself upon; and who in consequence unwittingly keep their husbands and their homes in a state of perpetual turmoil. I was not one of these, I am sure; but here I am, unmarried still."

"Would you marry now?" asked Helen briskly: and we all burst into a laugh at the question, Miss Deveen's the merriest.

"Marry at sixty! Not if I know it. I have at least twenty years too many for that; some might say thirty. But I don't believe many women give up the idea of marriage before they are forty: and I do not see why they should."

"But—why did you not marry, Miss Deveen?"

"Ah, my dear, if you wish for an answer to that question you must ask it of Heaven. I cannot give one. All I can tell you is, that I did hope to be married, and expected to be married, *waited* to be married; but here you see me in my old age—Miss Deveen."

"Did you—never have a chance of it—an opportunity?" questioned Helen with hesitation.

"I had more than one chance: I had two or three chances, just as you have had. During the time that each 'chance' was passing, if we may give it the term, I thought assuredly I should soon be a wife. But each chance melted away from this cause or that cause, ending in nothing. And the conclusion I have come to, Helen, for many a year past, is, that God, for some wise purpose of His own, decreed that I should not marry. What we know not here, we shall know hereafter."

Her tone had changed to one of deep reverence. She did not go on for a little time.

"When I look around the world and note how many admirable women see their chances of marriage dwindle down one after another, from unexpected and apparently trifling causes, it is impossible not to feel that the finger of God is at work. That——"

"But now, Miss Deveen, we *could* marry if we would—all of us," interrupted Helen. "If we did not have to regard suitability and propriety, and all that, there's not a girl but could go off to church and marry *somebody*."

"If it's only a broomstick," acquiesced Miss Deveen, "or a man no better than one. Yes, Helen, you are right: and it has occasionally been done. But when we fly antagonistically in the teeth of circumstances, bent on following our own resolute path, we take ourselves out of God's hands—and must reap the consequences."

"I—do not—quite understand," slowly spoke Helen.

"Suppose I give you an instance of what I mean, my dear. Some years ago I knew a young lady——"

"Is it *true*? What was her name?"

"Certainly, it is true, every detail of it. As to her name—well, I do not see any reason why I should not tell it: her name was Eliza Lake. I knew her family very well indeed, was intimate with her mother. Eliza was the third daughter, and desperately eager to be married. Her chances came. The first offer was eligible; but the two families could not agree about money matters, and it dropped through. The next offer Eliza would not accept—it was from a widower with children, and she sent him to the right-about. The third went on smoothly nearly to the wedding day, and a good and suitable match it would have been, but something occurred then very unpleasant, though I never knew the precise particulars. The bridegroom-to-be got into some trouble, or difficulty, had to quit his country hastily, and the marriage was broken off—was at an end.

That was the last offer she had, so far as I knew ; and the years went on, Eliza gadding out to parties, and flirting and coquetting, all in the hope to get a husband. When she was in her thirtieth year, her mother came to me one day in much distress and perplexity. Eliza was taking the reins into her own hands, purposing to be married in spite of her father, mother, and friends. Mrs. Lake wanted me to talk to Eliza ; and I took an opportunity of doing so—freely. It is of no use to mince matters when you want to save a girl from ruin. I recalled the past to her memory, saying that I believed, judging by that, Heaven did not intend her to marry. I told her all the ill I had heard of the man she was now choosing ; that she had absolutely thrown herself at him, and he had responded for the sake of the little money she possessed ; and that if she persisted in marrying him she would assuredly rue it."

"And what was her answer to you ?"—Helen spoke as if her breath were short.

"Just the reckless answer that a blinded, foolish girl would make. 'Though Heaven and earth were against me, I should marry him, Miss Deveen. I am beyond the control of parents, brothers, sisters, friends ; and I will not die an old maid to please any of you.' Those were the wilful words she used, I have never forgotten them ; and the next week she betook herself to church."

"Did the marriage turn out badly ?"

"Ay, it did. Could you expect anything else ? Poor Eliza supped the cup of sorrow to its dregs : and she brought sorrow also on her family. *That*, Helen, is what I call taking oneself out of God's hands, and flying determinately in the face of what is right, and seemingly, and *evidently appointed*."

"You say yourself it is hard not to be married," quoth Helen.

"No, I do not," laughed Miss Deveen. "I say that it appears hard to us when our days of youth are passing, and we see our companions chosen and ourselves left : but, rely upon it, Helen, as we advance in years we acquiesce in the decree ; many of us learning to be thankful for it."

"And you young people little think what cause you have to be thankful for it," cried Lady Whitney all in a heat. "Marriage brings a peck of cares : and nobody knows what anxiety boys and girls entail until they have them."

Miss Deveen nodded emphatically. "It is very true. I would not exchange my present lot with that of the best wife in England ; believe that, or not, as you will, Helen. Of all the different states this busy earth can produce, a lot such as mine is the most exempt from trouble. And, my dear, if you are destined never to marry, you have a great deal more cause to be thankful than rebellious."

"The other day, when you were preaching to us, you told us that trouble came for our own benefit," grumbled Helen, passing into rebellion forthwith.

"I remember it," assented Miss Deveen, "and very true it is. My heart has sickened before now at witnessing the troubles, apparently unmerited, that some people, whether married or single, have to undergo; and I might have been almost tempted to question the loving-kindness of Heaven, but for remembering that we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom."

Anna interrupted the silence that ensued. She came running up with a handful of wild roses and sweetbriar, gathered in the hedge below. Miss Deveen took them when offered to her, saying she thought of all flowers the wild rose was the sweetest.

"How solemn you all look!" cried Anna.

"Don't we!" said Helen. "I have been having a lecture read to me."

"By whom?"

"Everybody here—except Johnny Ludlow. And I am sure I hope *he* was edified. I wonder when tea is going to be ready!"

"Directly, I should say," said Anna: "for here comes Mrs. Ness with the cups and saucers."

I ran forward to help her bring the things. Rednal's trim wife, a neat, active woman with green eyes and a baby in her arms, was following with plates of bread-and-butter and cake, and the news that the kettle was "on the boil." Presently the table was spread; and William, who had come back to us, took up the baby's whistle and blew a blast, prolonged and shrill.

The stragglers heard it, understood it was the signal for their return, and came flocking in. The Squire and Sir John said they had been sitting under the trees and talking: our impression was, they had been sleeping. The young Whitneys appeared in various stages of heat; Tod and Featherston's nephew smelt of smoke.

The first cups of tea had gone round, and Tod was making for Rednal's cottage with a notice that the bread-and-butter had come to an end, when I saw a delicate little fair-haired face peering at us from amid the trees.

"Halloa!" cried the Squire, catching sight of the face at the same moment. "Who on earth's that?"

"It's the child we saw this morning—the gipsy's child," exclaimed William Whitney. "Here, you little one! Stop! Come here."

We only meant to give her a piece of cake: but the child ran off with a scared look and fleet step, and was lost in the trees. "Senseless little thing!" cried Bill: and sat down to his tea again.

"But what a pretty child it was!" observed the Mater. "She put me in mind of Lena."

"Why, Lena's oceans of years older," said Helen, free with her remarks as usual. "That child, from the glimpse I caught of her, can't be more than five or six."

"She is about seven, miss," struck in Rednal's wife, who had just come up with a fresh supply of tea. "It is nigh upon eight years since young Walter North went off and got married."

"Walter North!" repeated Sir John. "Who's Walter North? Let me see? The name seems familiar to me."

"Old Walter North was the parish schoolmaster over at Easton, sir. The son turned out wild and bad; and at the time his father died he went off and joined the gipsies. They had used to encamp about here more than they do now, as Rednal could tell you, Sir John; and it was said young North was in love with a girl belonging to the tribe—Bertha Lee. Any way, they got married. Right-down beautiful she was—for a gipsy; and so young."

"Then I suppose North and his wife are here now—if that's their child?" remarked Sir John.

"They are here sure enough, sir; somewhere in the wood. Rednal has seen him about this day or two past. Two or three times they'll be here, pestering, during the summer, and stop ten or twelve days. Maybe young North has a hankering after the old spots he was brought up in, and comes to see 'em," suggestively added Rednal's wife; whose tongue ran faster than any other two women's put together. And that's saying something.

"And how does this young North get a living?" asked Sir John. "By poaching?—and rifling the poultry-yards?"

"Like enough he do, Sir John. Them tramps have mostly light fingers."

"They sell tins—and collect rabbit skins," struck in William. "Johnny Ludlow and I charged the encampment this morning, and nearly got our fortunes told."

Jessy Rednal's chin went up. "They'd better let Rednal catch 'em at their fortune-telling!—it was the wife, I know, sir, did that. When she was but a slip of a girl she'd go up as bold as brass to any gentleman or lady passing, and ask them to cross her hand with silver."

With this parting fling at the gipsies, Rednal's wife ran off to the cottage for another basin of sugar. The heat made us thirsty, and we wanted about a dozen cups of tea apiece.

But now, I don't know why it was, but I had rather taken a fancy to this young woman, Bertha North, and did not believe the words "as bold as brass" could be properly applied to her. Gipsy though she was, her face, for good feeling and refinement, was worth ten of Jessy Rednal's. It's true she had followed us, wanting to tell our fortunes, but she might have been hard up for money.

When we had swallowed as much tea as the kettles would produce, and cleared the plates of the eatables, Sir John suggested that it would soon be time to move homewards, as the evening would be coming on. This had the effect of scattering some of us at once. If they did not get us, they could not take us. "Home, indeed! so soon as this!" cried Helen, wrathfully—and rushed off with her brother Harry and Featherston's nephew.

I was ever so far down one of the wood paths, looking about, for

somehow I had missed them all, when sounds of wailing and crying from a young voice struck my ear. In a minute, that same fair little child came running into view, as if she were flying for her life, her sobs wild with some terror, her face white as death.

What she said I could not make out, though she made straight up to me and caught my arm; the language seemed strange, the breath gone. But there was no mistaking the motions: she pulled me along with her across the wood, her little arms and eyes frantically imploring.

Something must be amiss, I thought. What was it?

"Is there a mad bull in the way, little one? And are you making off with me to do battle with him?"

No elucidation from the child: only the sobs, and the words I did not catch. But we were close to the outskirts of the wood now (it was but narrow), and there, beyond the hedge that bordered it, crouched down against the bank, was a man. A fair-faced, good-looking young man, small and slight, and groaning with pain.

No need to wonder who he was: the likeness between him and the child betrayed it. How like they were! even to the expression in the large blue eyes, and the colour of the soft fair hair. The child's face was his own in miniature.

"You are Walter North," I said. "And what's to do?"

His imploring eyes in their pitiful pain looked up to mine, as if he would question how I needed to ask it. Then he pulled his fustian coat aside and pointed to his side. It made me start a step back. The side was steeped in blood.

"Oh, dear, what is it?—what has caused it? An accident?"

"I have been shot," he answered—and I thought his voice sounded ominously weak. "Shot from over yonder."

Looking across the field in front of us towards which he pointed, I could see nothing. I mean nothing likely to have shot him. No men, no guns. Off to the left, partly buried amid its grounds, lay the old house called the Granary; to the right in the distance, Vale Farm. The little child was stretched on the ground, quiet now, her head on his right shoulder; it was the left side that was injured. Suddenly, he whispered a few words to her; she sprang up with a sob and darted into the wood. The child, as we heard later, had been sent out by her mother to look for her father: it was in seeking for him that she had come upon our tea-party and peeped at us. Later, she found him, fallen where he was now, just after the shot was fired. In her terror she was flying off for assistance, and met me. The man's hat lay near him, also an old drab-coloured bag, some tin basins, and a Dutch oven.

"Can I move you, to put you easier?" I asked amid his groaning.

"Can I do anything in the world to help you?"

"No, no, don't touch me," he said, in a hopeless tone. "I am bleeding to death."

And I thought he was. His cheeks and lips were getting paler with every minute. The man's diction was as good as mine; and, tramp though he was, many a gentleman has not half as nice a face as his.

"If you don't mind being left, I will run for a doctor—old Featherston."

Before he could answer yes or no, Harry Vale, who must have espied us from their land, came running up.

"Why—what in the world?" he began—"is it you, North? What? Shot, you say?"

"From over yonder, sir; and I've got my death-blow: I think I have. Perhaps if Featherston——"

"I'll fetch him," cried Harry Vale. "You stay here with him, Johnny." And he darted away like a lamplighter, his long legs skimming the grass.

I am nothing but a muff; you know that of old. And never did I feel my own deficiencies come home to me as they did then. Anybody else might have known how to stop the bleeding—for of course it ought to be stopped—if only by stuffing a handkerchief into the wound. I did not dare attempt it; I was worse at any kind of surgery than a born imbecile. All in a moment, as I stood there, the young gipsy woman's words of the morning flashed into my mind. She had foreseen some ill for him, she said; had scented it in the air. How strange it seemed!

The next to come upon the scene was the Squire, crushing through the brambles when he heard our voices. He and Sir John, in dire wrath at our flight, had come out to look for us and marshal us back for the start home. I gave him a few whispered words of explanation.

"What!" cried he. "Dying?" and his face went as pale as the man's. "Oh, my poor fellow, I am sorry for this!"

Stooping over him, the Squire pulled the coat aside. The stains were larger now, the flow was greater. North bent his head forward to look, and somehow got his hand wet in the process. Wet and red. He snatched it away with a kind of horror. The sight seemed to bring upon him the conviction that his minutes were numbered. His *minutes*. Which is the last and greatest terror that can seize upon man.

"I'm going before God now, and I'm not fit for it," he cried, a shrieking tone, born of emotion, in his weakening voice. "Can there be any mercy for me?"

The Squire seemed to feel it—he has said so since—as one of the most solemn moments of his life. He took off his spectacles—a habit of his when much excited—dropped them into his pocket, and clasped his hands together.

"There's mercy with the Lord Jesus always," he said, bending over the troubled face. "He pardoned the thief on the cross. He pardoned all who came to him. If you are Walter North, as they

tell me, you must know all this as well as I do. Lord God have mercy upon this poor dying man, for Christ's sake !”

And perhaps the good lessons that North had learnt in childhood from his mother, for she was a good woman, came back to him then to comfort him. He lifted his own hands towards the skies, and half the terror went out of his face.

Somebody once said, I believe, that by standing stock still in the Strand, and staring at any given point, he could collect a crowd about him in no time. In the thronged thoroughfares of London that's not to be surprised at ; but what I'd like to know is this—how is it that people collect in deserts ? They *do*, and you must have seen it often. Before many minutes were over we had quite a levee : Sir John Whitney, William, and Featherston's nephew ; three or four labourers from Vale Farm ; Harry Vale, who had outrun Featherston ; and one of the tall sons of Colonel Leonard. The latter, a young fellow with lazy limbs, a lazy voice, and supercilious manner, strolled up, smacking a dog-whip.

“What's the row here ?” cried he : and William Whitney told him. The man had been shot : by whom or by what means, whether wilfully or accidentally, remained to be discovered.

“Did you do it—or your brothers ?” asked Harry Vale of him in a low tone. And Leonard whirled round to face Vale with a haughty stare.

“What the devil do you mean ? What should we want to shoot a tramp for ?”

“Any way, you were practising with pistols at your target over yonder this afternoon.”

Leonard did not condescend to reply. The words had angered him. By no possibility could a shot, aimed at their target, come into this direction. The dog-whip shook, as if he felt inclined to use it on Harry Vale for his insolent suggestion.

“Such a fuss over a tramp !” cried Leonard to Sir John, not caring who heard him. “I daresay the fellow was caught thieving, and got served out for his pains. Look here !”

Catching hold of the bag to shake it, out tumbled a dead hen with ruffled feathers. Sir John looked grave. Leonard held it up.

“I thought so. It is still warm. He has stolen it from some poultry-yard.”

I chanced to be standing close to North as Leonard said it, and felt a feeble twitch at my trousers. Poor North was trying to attract my attention ; gazing up at me with the most anxious face.

“No,” said he, but he was almost too faint to speak now. “No. Tell them, sir, No.”

But Harry Vale was already taking up the defence. “You are wrong, Mr. Herbert Leonard. I gave that hen myself to North half an hour ago. Some little lads, my cousins, are at the farm to-day, and one of them accidentally killed the hen. Knowing our

people would not care to use it, I called to North, who chanced to be passing at the time, and told him he might take it if he liked."

A gleam of a smile, checked by a sob, passed over the poor man's face. Things wear a different aspect to us in the hour of death from what they do in lusty life. It may be that North saw then that theft, even of a fowl, *was* theft, and felt glad to be released from the suspicion. Sir John looked as pleased as Punch: one does not like to hear wrong brought home to a dying man.

Leonard turned off indifferently, and strolled back across the field, clacking his whip; and Featherston came pelting up.

The first thing the doctor did, when he had seen North's face, was to take a phial and small glass out of his pocket, and give him something to drink. Next, he made a clear sweep of us all round, and knelt down to examine the wound, just as the poor gipsy wife, fetched by the child, appeared in sight.

"Is there any hope?" whispered the Squire.

"Hope!" cried Featherston. "In half an hour it will be over!"

"God help him!" prayed the Squire. "God pardon and take him!"

Well, well—that is about all there is to tell. Poor North died there as he lay, in the twilight; his wife's arm round his neck, and his little girl feebly clasped to him.

What an end to the bright and pleasant day! Sir John thanked Heaven openly that it was not we who had caused the calamity.

"For *somebody* must have shot him, lads," he observed, "though I daresay it was accidental. And it might have chanced to be one of you—there's no telling: you are not too cautious with your guns."

The "somebody" turned out to be George Leonard. Harry Vale (who had strong suspicions) was right. When they dispersed after their target practising, one of them, George, went towards Briar Wood, his pistol loaded. The thick trees afforded a promising mark, he thought, and he carelessly let off the pistol at them. Whether he saw that he had shot a man was never known; he denied it out and out: didn't know one was there, he protested. A waggoner, passing homewards with his team, who had seen him fire the pistol, came forward to say so; or it might have been a mystery to the end. "Accidental Death," decided the jury at the inquest; but they recommended the supercilious young man (just as indifferent as his brothers) to take care what he fired at for the future. Mr. George did not take the rebuke kindly.

For these sons had hard, bad natures; and were doing their best to bring their father's grey hairs with sorrow to the grave.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

THROUGH HOLLAND.

I LEFT Utrecht for Zwolle, the capital of Over-Yssel, by the mid-day train. Would the reader like a somewhat more detailed description of Dutch scenery than has until now been inflicted upon him? It changes completely in aspect from that hitherto met with in Holland.

In a very short time we halt at De Bilt, a small station that rejoices in a plantation of fir trees, and looks as deserted as a settlement in the backwoods of America. Now comes a long waste of downs; sand plains in part covered with gorse, and ruby heather fading to a thin claret. Now a long stretch of young trees; some to be transplanted by-and-by to less wild and desolate regions; others to useful and domestic purposes. Beyond all these trees and sand and gorse one could almost imagine the sea roaring, for though concealed it is there. Now a break, disclosing a church, and a couple of windmills, apparently twins. The long stretch of arid plain distributes itself into miniature sandhills, which the sun here and there turns into gold. The train slackens and stops.

This is Goest. To our left, flat downs, barren and patchy; to our right, the country really undulating into slopes, perfectly clothed in rich gorse and heather. Far as the eye can reach all is green, purple, and golden. In the distance one solitary white house meets the eye, undisputed monarch of all it surveys. Here and there sheep browse upon the heathery plain. They seem to enjoy their repast so much that, involuntarily, we think of the greedy little pigs in a story of childhood's days, who at feeding time invariably grunted out, "Sweet cobs! nice cobs! juicy cobs! more cobs!" One wonders whether at sundown these sheep find their way by instinct to their own pens, or are allowed to rove about on the moors at will—like those sheep in the biped world who are not considered white. The gorse, standing out in so rich a contrast with the green and the purple, occasionally rises to the dignity of immense bushes. Upon a long stretch of flat plain, across there, some cavalry from Amersfoort are exercising. All this passes, and we come to thick plantations of oak trees, firs, and stiff, gloomy-looking pines. The train stops at Amersfoort.

A quaint and curious old place, as a fellow-traveller observes. Certainly the wonderful old tower, with its crown-shaped summit, is in itself a promise of many good things that might be disclosed if the intervening trees were only cut down. One longs to get out and make more intimate acquaintance with this venerable edifice: grave and ancient save in its crown-summit and gilded weathercock.

The latter points, alas, to S.W., and foretells rain. The clouds indeed are gathering depth and approaching the earth. Our twenty minutes' halt has changed the bright sunshine into gloom. So, projections from that tower, which look like gurgoyles, but we fancy are not, appear to be sending forth a doom upon the world. Off we go again. Towards the town, a small flock of people, who have just left the train, are wending their way, including three priests with long robes and Gamp-like umbrellas and tall black hats. Another halt before we have got many yards, to take up a late passenger running round the corner in breathless excitement. They are not particular about here, and obligingly wait five minutes on occasion for an approaching individual; or when they have started will put back again to admit him. We have halted in front of a garden of sunflowers, their faces turned southwards and upwards, announcing as plainly as a dial that the day has passed its meridian.

Off again, this time with a fair start, and the tower looms out grandly in the distance. The surrounding country changes aspect and is broken up into fields and hedges, whilst sheaves of grain give promise that presently the plough will be briskly at work here. The country is soon cut up into immense plantations of oak trees, which again yield to pastures and the inevitable black-and-white cows. Now fields of cabbages, orchards with fruit-laden trees, a tower cleaving the grey sky, a few straggling cottages with their red-tiled roofs, and the train stops at Nykerk. It runs beyond the station, and a buxom young lady, with a bandbox, and flowing robes, and bewitching dimples, is lifted down quite a precipitous height, amidst much laughter and blushing, by the guard and the stationmaster; the latter resplendent in a red cap and a gold band. But, like the day, he has passed his meridian, whilst the guard is young, active, and well shaped; and somehow the buxom young lady contrives to catch her foot in that troublesome dress of hers, and would fall heavily to the ground, but that she falls far more lightly and gracefully into the arms of the least reluctant guard in the world. She blushes still more vividly and makes a host of apologies, but the guard, whose face reflects her own rosy hue, is evidently wondering how he can manage to ask her to repeat the performance. Whilst he is yet ruminating the young lady disappears with her dimples, and blushes, and bandbox—and the train moves on. A few minutes of rapid movement, and an old woman comes out of a signal-box, with a long stick or flag, to indicate that the line is clear. She is a quaint picturesque object with her short blue petticoats, her red kerchief crossed over the shoulders, and her low mushroom hat. Picturesque, to the unfamiliar traveller's eye, at any rate. To the guard, who is leaning out of his window, thinking of the delicious armful of maidenly beauty in all her spring freshness, to which he has just been treated, the old woman probably suggests no other idea than that of parchment, or a mummy, with corresponding emotions. Only another proof that time waits for no

man. That old woman has had her day ; and in that day those still pleasant and well-cut though withered features awoke sensations in some fair youth's breast as glowing as any inspired by our vanished heroine.

The train passes on through a country that discloses no new feature until we stop at Putten. The names of the various stations do not fall musically upon an Englishman's ear. The station at Putten is being rebuilt. Bricks and mortar meet the eye, and a cloud of dust more English and unpleasant than anything we have encountered this morning. In certain broad details countenances resemble each other, events repeat themselves. At Putten a goodly number of people alight, including a Saxon-looking Dutchman and his pretty wife ; the latter dressed à la Quakeress : a short brown silk gown that displays small feet and neatly-turned ankles, a richly-embroidered black shawl, and a black silk cottage bonnet, a white border surrounding the face in most coquettish and alluring fashion. Let the adjectives stand, young ladies ; 'tis rare enough they can be written now. And how clean and respectable those two country women look, coming up behind her, with their short black gowns and caps white as the driven snow. How they remind us of our own French nurses of earliest recollections ; and how, in consequence, our heart warms towards them, as memory goes back to life's happiest period.

Here again the country opens out for a time, and distance lends enchantment to the view. Certainly there is not, for the moment, anything else to enchant. But those trees appearing across there as we proceed, those low bushes, how lovely in tone ; what an exquisite olive-green beneath the grey sky : in themselves a picture. And now again, mile after mile, on either hand, plantations of young oak trees.

Suddenly the trees break up and disappear on our left, and there falls upon the enchanted sight a view of the glorious sea and a multitude of small vessels. It is not very near at hand ; it is not rough or turbulent ; it is even grey and cold under the leaden sky ; but it is calm and unruffled ; it is the sea ; and a sense of grandeur and repose overtakes the spirit : refreshing as the incense of rain upon the long parched earth. The train halts at Hardewyk. We should like to get out and pay our respects to the little Zuyder Zee port, and gather up a stock of energy after the debilitating air of Amsterdam. When we depart again, after a long halt, we have lost the sea, and gradually turn inland. More downs. After Huchorst, we come upon—for Holland—positive sandhills, which might be giants' graves. They abound and increase in size until the mind, depressed by so much flat country to the level of a pancake, begins to have dim notions of possible mountains should this kind of thing go on increasing say for a thousand miles. Certainly they are interlarded by plantations of pines ; and here and there a small hut and a garden, where sticks very much out of the perpendicular have been

dressed up into scarecrows to save from marauders sundry cabbages, sprinkled about like feathers upon a moulting bird. In the midst of this oasis rise a church, a windmill, and the village of Nunspeet. The train halts. These frequent and prolonged stoppages would become monotonous to anyone not as anxious for glimpses of new and original characters, not as earnest in seeking the picturesque, as ever was the renowned though not particularly refined Dr. Syntax.

As the train stops a young porter comes up with a postbag; and, passing, touches his cap. Here, at any rate, is a new trait to an Englishman. How often would a porter do the like in England, unless you happened to be known to him? After leaving this station a man issues from the sentry-box with his staff and flag, and is certainly a much less interesting object than our little withered old woman. Once more comes an immense tract of moorland, with its purple gorse, melting into blackness in that long stretch of rising ground in the horizon. A solitary crow is winging his elevated flight across the sky. Another halt, another station. But where are the church and the windmill? The eye sweeps the country and the horizon in vain. And a very wide sweep it is. They must be behind that rising ground so far away; at the end of that long, straight, white road, cut between the gorse; so long, so straight, seemingly so interminable that instinctively we shudder as we are reminded of those dreams of childhood, wherein a task was allotted to us for which eternity itself would be too short: and the horror-stricken awakening with the awful burden of a never-ending struggle. That far-away waggon on the white road looks smaller than a wheelbarrow, the horse less than a fly, whilst the waggoner is totally lost to sight. This station rejoices in a compound name—Elburg-Epe. It has been a landmark in our time table, and we begin to feel that the journey will have an end.

Off again. Moors where sheep are browsing; and an old shepherd who gazes after the train, as if such things were unknown in his young days: and the black line of rising ground in the distance, here and there shining white and golden, as the gorse gives place to bare sand: and the red sails of a windmill busy at their everlasting chase. In a few minutes a halt at Wezep: a very unimportant place, evidently, as nothing alights but a placard: possibly a warning to be placed on the moors, cautioning unwary travellers not to go astray on the wide waste. We soon come to more civilisation. For the first time men and women are working in the fields quite close to us. As the train slackens speed we notice their Dutch-Chinese countenances. The women are strong and sturdy; those men leaning over the gate with spades and pickaxes look short and undeveloped. The train halts at Hattem. From this point there are more signs of life. Rich pastures on either hand. A wealth and luxuriance of verdure and vegetation, to which nothing we have yet seen in Holland can be compared. The eye brightens, the heart

and spirit expand, as we come upon beauty so long withheld. It is food to a starving soul. You wish the train would halt that you might enjoy this at leisure: a rapid glance is altogether insufficient. Black-and-white cows are grazing in herds: they do not all mix together: probably they have their differences of rank and station, and political opinions. Farm houses, large and flourishing, are sprinkled about. A couple of modern-looking churches with tapering spires disclose themselves; busy windmills. Far off rows of trees such as we have not yet seen for size and beauty; nearer ones of ash, with their pale grey, rustling leaves. We roll over a splendid bridge spanning the broad Yssel, with lively barges upon its surface; we pass grand, park-like grounds that would almost grace a southern clime; and the train halts at Zwolle.

We reached Zwolle somewhere about four o'clock. Tired of the train, which seemed to travel upon the principle of "hurrying no man's cattle," I was glad to exchange it for the rattling omnibus, which dashed through the outskirt of the town, thundered on to the drawbridge, over a small navigable stream called the Zwarte Water, and finally, in a kind of circumbendibus fashion, stopped its mad flight at the door of the hotel.

The inn was situated in an open space or square. Before it, far down, the Zwarte Water ran its sluggish race. Trees were planted beside its banks, so that I felt surrounded by the elements of rural beauty. The inn was clean, but somewhat primitive; and as I had had the omnibus to myself, so in like manner I seemed to be the only guest within the walls of the hotel. The table d'hôte, for which I was just in time, consisted of a *parti carré*; three visitors out of the four coming in from the town and departing as soon as dinner was over. I followed their example, and in the twilight paid a visit to the church; a Gothic edifice with immense aisles, and one of the finest carved pulpits in Holland; and a vestry or committee room, entered by a short flight of steps at the bottom of the church, of which the sacristan was especially proud, but which seemed, in the deepening gloom, uninteresting. The good man insisted upon my mounting the pulpit to inspect the wonderful old Bible; and truly it was worth the trouble.

The town itself is ancient, but has modern houses and improvements about it which destroy its old-world effect. In this respect Zwolle is disappointing. It is clean and well built—what town in Holland is not?—and is situated on the Zwarte Water, the stream already alluded to. Few towns have gone through more perils and vicissitudes; not only of war, but also of fire, and water, and sickness. In 1398 it fell a victim to the plague, which carried off the people at an alarming rate: a more deadly foe than the enemies of the battle-field. To-day the little town is quiet and prosperous. To the chance visitor it seems very far removed from the world,

and may pursue the even tenor of its way undisturbed by the outside rush and roar. The principal street is a long, straight thoroughfare, with a few large shops rejoicing in plate-glass windows. One feels inclined to rebel against such innovations in an old capital. The shops, that night, were alight with gas, which showed up their contents, but threw the surrounding houses into greater obscurity. Few people were visible; and none of the quaint costumes one might expect to find so far up from the more civilised and accessible portions of Holland. I wandered about, and got out of my latitude, and lost my bearings to all intents and purposes. In vain I was directed to turn three times to the right and five to the left, and then describe a circle: it always ended in coming back to the same point. At last, in some mysterious manner, the silken clue to this labyrinth of streets was put into my hand, and I soon found myself on the drawbridge facing the inn.

The Zwarte Water looked cold and black. A barge was moored a few yards off, and the darkness and silence on board announced, it deserted, or its occupants slumbering. Probably they were in some café near at hand, drinking beer and harmlessly passing away an hour at cards, or dominoes, or billiards, or whatever may be the national and popular game of this people. Had I waited, and, been gifted with Miss Pecksniff's sharp vision, I might perhaps have seen them coming round the corner on their way to a well-earned repose. But the old tower struck out the hour—ten: an hour that sounded weird and ghostly in this out-of-the-world capital. I gazed into the black water until I fancied strange faces and phantoms with grinning mouths and glowing eyes were rising to its surface and tempting me to join them in their spirit world. With a half shudder I looked round. Stillness reigned; gloom and darkness. A light gleamed here and there in the windows of the inn, some hundred feet off, but elsewhere the curfew seemed long to have tolled the knell of parting day. The simple folk all slumbered and slept: laying in a fresh stock of energy against the rising of the sun. Happy they—as it seemed by strange contrast—who were able to go to roost with the fowls and rise with the dawn. They see the new-born day in the first flush of youth, before the mists have risen to rub the bloom off earth and trees and sky. These early moments are clothed with a charm that gilds none of the after hours.

So with the last vibration, when the air had again settled down to stillness, I gave up gazing into the Zwarte Water, which somehow seemed to send forth a certain dangerous fascination, and, crossing the square, sought the refuge of the inn. A room comfortable and quiet; where, if so inclined, I could still trace the line of the Zwarte Water from the windows; or contemplate the great tower that reared its head above the houses like a grim goblin guarding the town. But I preferred, by the light of a lamp as brilliant and modern as if it had come straight from London, taking up

my parable to absent friends from the point at which it had ceased the previous night. There was no ecclesiastical atmosphere about Zwolle, as about Utrecht; but, to counterbalance, from this far-away place your words must be read with the feeling and impression one devotes to a favourite author of the last century. Eleven o'clock, and from the four quarters of the tower a watchman blew a loud and melancholy horn, announcing to the slumbering inhabitants that all was safe: nor fire, water, nor deadly foe threatened the peace of the town. Then in slow and solemn strokes boomed forth the hour. So it went on throughout the night. But it was a different and more bearable experience than the crashing chimes of Amsterdam. Distance now lent enchantment to the sound. It was even possible to sleep through this noise; or at least to turn round with a comfortable feeling of security for oneself and of pity for the horn-blower; and, like the sluggard, slumber again.

The next morning at breakfast I watched from the windows the loading of the barge which had interested me so much in the dark hours. But the romance of night, the mystery of darkness, which for some reason appeals so strongly to the imagination, and excites it to so high a pitch, was absent. Barge and men in the broad daylight hours seemed invested with a very prosaic interest. They were hard at work, loading wood. Their task ended, they loosed their moorings, the bridge was swung open, the toll was dropped into the little leathern pocket at the end of the fishing-rod, and away they went. I saw them no more.

Breakfast over, I started at once for the post-office—that ever delightful walk with the expectation of receiving home letters at the end: for which, when abroad, and especially when removed from civilisation, one seems to long with the longing of a thirsty soul in a dry land. The possibilities of chances and changes assail the too vivid imagination in a very unreasonable manner: and yet who—the most matter-of-fact amongst us—is quite free from the feeling, unless he possesses a heart of steel and a mind altogether devoid of fancy?

Somehow we all seem to know our way as by instinct to the post-office. A kindly genius leads onward. It was found this morning easily enough: in a square shaded by trees, noisy and gay with butter and vegetable women, presiding over their stalls and retailing amidst themselves a week's gossip. A lively scene. One woman, in a picturesque costume and rich jewellery that bespoke a thrifty housewife, held up, as I passed, a fine capon: a wonderful creature even for a land more or less famous for the cattle of Pharaoh's fat kind. In full guttural Dutch patois, accompanied by a killing flash from a bright brown eye, she asked me if I would not be her first customer. Those bright eyes had nearly conquered. Like a weak Briton I had almost bought the fowl—which must have enriched my landlord's larder in lieu of other destination—when the fact of having to carry it through the town proved a more powerful

appeal to that sense of the ridiculous few of us are without, than did the bright eyes to the subduing of a reason that is a less universal gift. With a laugh at my folly, in which the temptress fairly joined, I left the bird to the possession of a happy Dutch vrouw who came up at the instant. The price, however, had to be sensibly abated. For myself, I went off to the post-office, received my letters, and felt in love and charity with all mankind.

Performing a circuitous journey on my way back to the hotel, I passed through the Sassenpoort; the quaintest building in Zwolle. An old gateway with pointed turrets; the only remaining gateway out of nine that were once the glory of the town. The building looks solid, yet antiquated and curious to the last degree, with a pointed archway, four towers, with their loopholes or small windows, surmounted by pepperbox turrets, and the body of the structure crowned by a slanting roof, a clock tower with bells, and an old weathercock, who this morning pointed for a westerly wind. There was something more than ordinarily dignified about the old gateway, partly derived from the style of its architecture, partly from its solid age, which seemed at once to have gained the beauties of time and defied its ravages. In walking through Zwolle you quickly discover that very few of its houses are old and quaint like those, for instance, of Hoorn. The town consequently produces a very different impression upon you. It is only in looking up at an old gateway such as the Sassenpoort that you forget the present and lose yourself in recollections and customs and dreams of the past.

At the hotel, according to arrangement, a carriage was in waiting to drive me to Kampen. Away we started. The morning, by no means warm, in spite of the west wind, threatened rain. The old coachman, a sleepy individual who drove his lean quadruped at mourning pace, was enveloped in a fur cloak that might have done duty in the wilds of Siberia. He trotted over the bridge, turned sharply to the left, and very quickly had put all houses behind us. The drive was long and dreary. At first the road was lined on either side with a somewhat fine row of trees, and a dyke beyond. Dykes, indeed, were everywhere, and occasional windmills for draining the land, which here is particularly marshy. At intervals we passed a roadside farmhouse; and ranged against the outside walls, placed there to dry, row above row in the form of a triangle, were the most perfect and beautiful brass pails and pans imaginable. Such objects are never seen in England. Our dairies are furnished with plain earthenware pans and wooden buckets that possess no other recommendation than that of cleanliness; whilst those in Holland are really artistic, worthy of a painter's time and attention. A Dutch vrouw takes as much pride in the articles of her dairy as an English fanatic (if the term may be allowed) gives to a collection of old china.

The drive came to an end at last. The steeples of Kampen

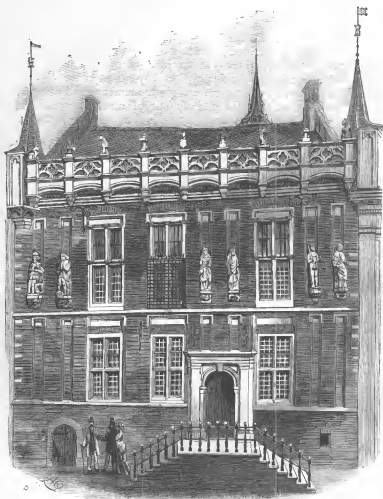
declared themselves. A sharp turn to the left, and we passed on to the fine but too narrow suspension bridge spanning the Yssel. In a few moments the carriage had put up at the inn, and I found myself at large in the streets of the little town.

Kampen is built near the mouth of the Yssel. It is a seaport of the Zuyder Zee, but at some little distance from its shores. The town does not possess the age of Hoorn, its deadness or quaintness. Yet it is quaint undoubtedly; and though only dating back to the thirteenth century, gives you an idea of age, of a bygone history, of a distinct individuality, far beyond anything to be observed in Zwolle. It has more curious monuments, and whereas Zwolle possesses but one old gateway out of nine, Kampen has preserved whole and entire four out of seven. These gateways and the old town hall are its pride and attraction. The latter is one of the most curious and rare buildings in Holland: a Gothic structure, in itself sufficient repayment for a visit to Kampen. A portion of it was unhappily destroyed by fire, and that portion was rebuilt and forms the present town hall; but what remains of the old is complete in itself. The exterior of the house wore a cheerful, almost smiling aspect. Ancient mullioned windows with thick iron bars before some of them like cages; and between the windows sculptured figures of Charlemagne, Alexander, and some of the Virtues; stone carvings perhaps more quaint than beautiful. The roof was slanting, and, gazing up from below, a portion of it was hidden by beautiful Gothic, crumbling tracery, which with its griffins gave a romantic and refined finish to this side of the building. At either end was a small turret surmounted by a huge vane, and behind might be observed the upper portion of the bell tower.

This old town hall was a corner building, and the side was as peculiar, though not as rich in decoration, as the front. Its high pointed roof terminated in a somewhat heavy chimney. But the bell tower could be seen here, a portion of, yet standing out from the main edifice.

Strange and interesting as was the exterior of this town hall, the interior was yet more so. A short flight of stone steps led to the entrance. Then up an old staircase to the first floor, where you entered a room the like of which I had never seen in Europe, and do not expect to see again. It was a small room; nothing in its size could impose or strike upon the visitor with awe. The first impression was one of solemn gloom, too deep to take in all the points at a glance on first coming out from the broad daylight. The walls were panelled with carved oak dark with age. Around the walls seats were fitted in after the manner of stalls, richly sculptured. The chimney, occupying almost one side of the chamber, was heavy and massive, especially grand and beautiful in its magnificent workmanship, dating back to the year 1543. Beside it, in the farther corner, was an immense seat surmounted by a canopy of carved wood

before which, on wood of equal beauty, rested a plain desk. Three steps led up to this seat, which might indeed be called a seat of judgment. The ceiling was arched and vaulted in sculptured wood



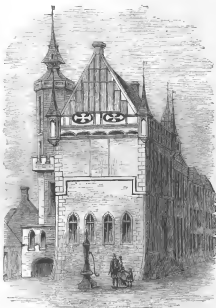
TOWN HALL, KAMPEN.

of matchless elegance, the black relieved by flowers picked out with gold, from which long since all brilliancy had faded.

The entire aspect of the room was solemn and gloomy ; portentous. The mind felt charmed and delighted, yet almost overweighed. It was a room fitted for state secrets ; for weighty counsels on which

might depend the fate of an empire ; where trials for treason might be held and extreme sentences delivered. A judge, in that grand seat, might put on a black cap and be in perfect harmony with his surroundings.* A hapless prisoner would unconsciously gather from its aspect that his doom was sealed. A room that might have been fitted for the secret councils of a Spanish Inquisition. Under such circumstances its sombre gloom would be turned into something cold and savage, influencing the minds of those already too fearfully inclined.

When at length I turned my back upon it, I felt that Kampen, in comparison with this, would possess little that was interesting. Next came the gateways ; and especially the Brøderspoort, or Brothers' Gate, and the Cellebrøderspoort ; the latter named after an order of monks, who possessed all things in common, and appear to have died out in common, as they have left no representatives behind them. The quaintness and originality of their architecture was at once observable. The Cellebrøderspoort was the more ancient of the two ; and though dating back to the commencement of the sixteenth century, or the close of the fifteenth, was in a state of perfect preservation. A high pointed roof, with three small windows, which looked out upon



TOWN HALL, KAMPEN (SIDE VIEW).

the bridge and the water and the gardens adorning this outskirt of Kampen, converted by its inhabitants into a delightful park or promenade. On either side the roof towers kept guard, surmounted by steeples which raised themselves far above it, terminated by thin rods of iron holding a small ball of the same metal, possibly lightning-conductors. At intervals in the narrowing spires were small windows or loopholes, which gave a keen scrutiny over the town and surrounding country. Below the roof in the massive stonework were three windows belonging to inhabited rooms : and then came the slightly pointed archway which concluded this beautiful structure. The Brøderspoort, as quaint in outline, was rougher in detail and less beautiful. But one was not disposed to quarrel with these

wonderful old buildings for possessing more or less of beauty. They are as rare to meet as they are acceptable. Kampen is happy and fortunate in their possession; and in gazing upon them the traveller feels himself in an unknown, almost a new world. They had not the venerable dignity of the Sassenpoort of Zwolle, but on the whole, taken in conjunction with their surroundings, they were much more curious and impressive.

Not only the gates of Kampen, but its people, made one feel in a strange land. More than in any other town, Hoorn excepted, I was the subject of remark and attention from its inhabitants. The advent of a visitor is apparently a rare event amongst them, and as such must not be passed over in silence. So, wandering through the long streets (in this respect Kampen seemed to be of a consumptive tendency, all length and no breadth), I found myself frequently the subject of surprise, admiration, or suspicion, whichever it might be, from a rapidly increasing group at every convenient corner or otherwise quiet thoroughfare.

The two churches of St. Mary and St. Nicholas, at opposite ends of the town, large and fine, dated from the fourteenth century. But in praising the churches of Holland, it must be, for the most part, with a decided reservation. The church of St. Nicholas is a building of great size and high vaulted roofs and large windows, with a pulpit of carved stone that would be beautiful were it not ruined by paint. How much this Dutch mania is to be deplored! Exquisite carvings; the tone of antiquity; fine organs; beautiful tracery; whenever they can daub over a coat of coarse colouring, there too often it is to be found. St. Nicholas was no exception to the rule. I had some difficulty in obtaining entrance. No one seemed to know where the sacristan lived. At last a little old woman, bent and shrivelled with age, surely the female counterpart of the wandering Jew, tottered up from her seat and put me in the right way.

Kampen is the only town in Holland whose inhabitants live free of taxes. Its bygone richness and prosperity were such as to relieve its inhabitants from the penalties of taxation for ever. It is consequently a cheap place to live in, much resorted to by people of small incomes. Its chief trade is in timber. But its streets, like so many of the streets in these out-of-the-world places, are quiet and almost deserted.

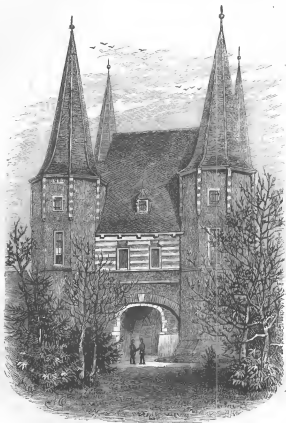
Finally I returned to the inn, summoned the coachman, and whilst he was making ready, indulged in the luxury of a cup of coffee. Then we started on our return journey. Past the old town hall, on which I had bestowed a last fond look; over the suspension bridge, and fairly on the way to Zwolle. The town from this point looked quaint enough. The waters of the Yssel, a broad stream, washed its foundations. Upon its banks rose curious old gateways, walls, and houses; above them reared the pointed steeples of churches, and

town halls, and more gateways. The old place seemed to be slumbering away its life, calm and tranquil as the waters of the stream on which it was built. Then all this was left behind us. Before us a long, straight road; dykes, cattle, and windmills; trees, and cultivated fields, and green pastures. Across the meadows there, over the heads of the trees and the hedges, a solitary stork winging its flight. Was it a widower; a "lone, lorn creetur," like Mrs. Gummidge? or had it gone through the divorce court? or was it nothing better than an eccentric old bachelor?—for I suppose they have all these vicissitudes in the bird kingdom, or things are unequally divided. It was soon out of sight, and we continued our solitary way through this deserted country.

The next morning, indefatigable in my researches, I started early on the expedition I had most at heart: the cemetery where I hoped to find the remains of the monastery so long occupied by Thomas à Kempis, and the grave of the saint himself. The same driver and horse were placed at my disposal—as though Zwolle could produce none other. The man looked seventy, and it was difficult to tell whether he or the quadruped was the elder. I had made inquiries of mine host at the inn concerning Thomas à Kempis. He knew nothing of the grave and had never heard of the saint. As for a monastery, or the ruins of one, this must be a myth. There was a cemetery, certainly, where the rich were buried; it was on rising ground, but was nothing to look at. After digging a foot or so on flat ground you came to water; so the rising ground was kept for the rich, and the flat fell to the poor. This did not seem a very pleasant state of things. I thought little of the landlord's ignorance, knowing that very often the nearer an object is to the eye the less it will be seen. Mine host evidently put me down as an eccentric Englishman with a mania for cemeteries and antediluvian horses; and possibly delivered to the coachman a quiet warning to look after my safety.

We had about three-quarters of an hour's drive before us; a portion of it on the road we had travelled yesterday to Kampen. When at length we turned aside it was not to improve the prospect. Nothing more dreary and desolate could be conceived. We appeared, indeed, to be journeying to life's end—the graveyard. Not one person did we pass, no sign of name or local habitation. The ground was marshy and uncultivated. A rough road, an ascent, a surrounding bear-garden, and the driver announced "here we were." We were indeed. He had stopped at the door of a small house or cottage. I dismounted from the ramshackle vehicle, which must have come into the world at least a generation before the horse, and entered. From the woman's manner I do not think she had seen a strange face for at least five years. In absence of mind I addressed her in an unknown tongue. "Could she direct me to the grave of Thomas à Kempis?" She replied with intelligent alacrity, sped across the room, swung back the door of a cupboard, and disclosed a list of

a dozen beverages, any of which she would be happy to produce. If not gifted with a calm and equable temperament, edifying to contemplate, I might be tempted to lose patience at the manner in which, go where you will, the people seem to think it one's first and last duty to drink and drink again. I explained my wants more fully to the

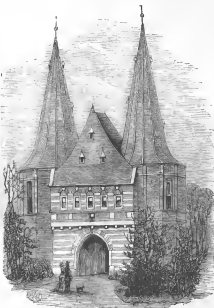


BRUEDERSPOORT.

vrouw. This time she understood, and, opening an inner door, beckoned mysteriously for me to enter. I began to wonder whether the saint's grave was enclosed here, after the manner of Peter the Great's house at Zaandam. The woman pointed to an engraving upon the wall. That she assured me was all I should find of Thomas à Kempis. It was a small, roughly-executed, but quaint woodcut. In the midst of a field sat the saint, bald-headed, in monk's dress. His face was long and narrow, and in this respect reminded one of the streets of Kampen. A large book lay on his knees, which might be

either a copy of the Scriptures or the bound parchments of his own manuscript, at the fancy of the gazer. His hands reposed upon the open volume, his eyes sought the clouds. In the background, considerably smaller than the saint, was his monastery, and the church, with a little pointed steeple. A wall, comically drawn, enclosed the whole.

I gazed in bewilderment. The woman took it for admiration, and joined me with clasped hands. I turned to her in despair. Where were the remains of the monastery? the grave of the saint? She laughed a peculiar little laugh; such a laugh as we sometimes give to a child whose intelligence has not yet fully developed. There had been no remains for ages and ages, she affirmed; not one brick upon another; not even a trace of any foundation. As for a grave, she had never heard of one. There was the cemetery — pointing to a short distance, where, on rising ground, enclosed in a hedge, the “turf heaved in many a mouldering heap” — I might search as much as I liked. But I saw that the woman thought me not quite right in my mind, and was prepared to act on the defensive. I thanked her for her civility; and as I left the cottage she quietly closed the door, and shot the bolt, and heaved a sigh of relief. As the coachman lumbered round to the cemetery I looked back. She was watching me with a pale face in which alarm had given place to pity. I was very soon amongst the graves, looking round and about. As the woman had said, there was nowhere the slightest trace of a monastery. All had long since passed away. Monks, and convent, and saint; nothing to tell of what had been, but a remembrance or tradition; and a little book that has passed into a household word in almost every known and civilised tongue.



CELLEBRGEDERSPOORT.

And for the grave? With a feeling of severe disappointment, of righteous anger against those “authorities,” verbal and written, who had misled me, I recognised no sign of what I had come to see. Could it be one of those nameless and neglected heaps, with no

mark to show that the body of a saint of the earth, greater amongst mankind than the most illustrious hero or the founder of a dynasty, lay beneath, awaiting in rest and peace the last trumpet sound? I thought not. I wandered to the farther end of the graveyard, where just beyond its confines a modern schoolhouse reared its head. A young Dutchman was leaning from an open window, and, catching sight of me, came out quickly. He had a fancy for airing his French, which he spoke wonderfully well considering the few advantages he possessed. He informed me that he was studying to become a professor: hoped to pass his examinations, go out into the world, and make his way among his fellows. There was something about him that told me he would succeed in doing it. I asked him about the monastery and the grave. He said I was not the first who had gone up there in a vain hope. A monastery had once existed, it was true, but all traces had long disappeared. He could not even point out the precise spot on which it stood. So with the grave. Thomas à Kempis *had* been buried there once upon a time; but ages ago his bones were removed to his birthplace, Kempen, a small town on the lower Rhine. Many a time perplexities had arisen by confusing together the two names, Kampen and Kempen.

The young fellow was evidently delighted to have some one to talk to from the outer world. He seemed to hunger to get into that world. What hopes was he cherishing of its pleasures or glories: that, as a rule, when attained, only crumble to ashes or turn to bitterness in the mouth? I talked long with him, and was surprised to find how well up he was in literature and many other things one would have thought altogether beyond his reach. He warmed, and grew quite excited, and seemed as pleased with the interview as if I had brought him the pledge of a successful examination, or an appointment to a professor's chair in the great world he longed to enter. He meant to go back to his studies, his hard solitary life, more earnest and determined than ever. And I left him with a feeling that if I had not found what I came for, my long dull drive had not been quite useless. To cheer the heart and brace up the reins of one struggling against poverty, or fate, or adverse circumstances, especially when the task comes unexpectedly, reflects back a certain lightness of spirit that bears its own reward, and keeps the sympathies from growing rusty, or perhaps dying out altogether.

A drive back to Zwolle; a hasty lunch at the inn; a quick drive to the station in the rattling omnibus, that tore through the streets to the utter terror of an antiquated spinster-passenger, who swayed from side to side, and shrieked, and became hysterical, and had to be assisted into the waiting-room: and I found myself on the road to Friesland.

CHARLES W. WOOD.

BERTHA'S SPINNING-WHEEL.

Frau Bertha sits the livelong day
 And turns her spinning-wheel ;
 She says, " I spin the hours away,
 And wind them on my reel ;"
 Frau Bertha's spindle seldom stands,
 Though never yarn is in her hands.
 The children loiter by her door,
 And watch her fingers go ;
 Her busy treadle on the floor,
 Her voice down-dropping low
 In murmurs from the poor, pale lips,
 Once scarlet ripe, like mellowed hips.
 She murmurs softly in the air,
 " Mein Carl, and lieber Mann !
 Their threads are lost, those threads so fair,
 The golden ones that ran
 Through all my life in far-off years,
 Now blurred with rain of blood and tears.
 " I lost them both at once—those two ;
 They rode with our Crown Prince,
 My Hans and Carl, so brave and true,
 Both gone :—and always since
 This heart has had no peace for pain,
 Because two threads broke in my brain.
 " 'Twas just before the French took flight
 (I'll not forget that sign !)
 I heard the death-watch in the night
 And marked the hour for mine
 With a red cross, deep, burning red,
 A cross to mind me of my dead.
 " I seek, and strive, and fail to find
 A thread of flax to spin ;
 There is no yarn for me to wind,
 My grave-sheet to begin,
 And yet I turn the wheel all day,
 And spin my weary hours away."

* * * * *

So summers wane and winters pass,
 So Spring comes after Fall,
 And gold cups flourish in the grass,
 And bindweeds on the wall,
 And still Frau Bertha turns her wheel
 With never yarn upon the reel.

JANE DIXON.

ONE WOMAN'S TREACHERY.

"WHEN the sun sets, to-morrow, be at the stile, by the cross-road."

The people were pouring out of St. James's Church; the chief church of the large town of Richborough. The organist was playing some sad, fitful chords, something from the Messiah; and under cover of their melting sweetness, the audacious whisperer, a young and handsome man, had bent forward to make this appointment.

The two young ladies, to one of whom he had spoken, were walking down the aisle side by side. Dorothy Stevens, for whom the whisper was undoubtedly intended, glanced up a mute look of assent through her golden curls. But it chanced that the other lady heard it too, for her ears were subtle, and a dark cloud drifted over the sunshine of her face; her little hand clenched itself spasmodically under the rich lace of her shawl. She fell back a step, and glanced coldly into the gentleman's face. He was holding his hat in his gloved hand, and he bowed ceremoniously as his eyes met hers. At least, as ceremoniously as one can bow, coming out of church.

"Good morning, Miss Lawrence," he said, distantly; and just then they emerged from the aisle to the vestibule. Miss Lawrence held out a tiny hand, which he could not do otherwise than take.

He released it immediately, notwithstanding her clinging touch, but the little hand was not to be so repulsed. It fluttered to his arm, and rested there, just one finger being on the coat cuff.

"There is such a throng," murmured the young lady in an entreating tone of apology; "and people never mind where they put their feet. I am sure my flounces will be in rags."

Mr. Hastings perhaps anathematized first the crowd and next the perishable flounces: but what could he do, save take the girl under his wing? Dorothy looked back and saw him coming down the steps with the beautiful heiress hanging on his arm in that frightened, appealing, clinging manner, which she knew so well how to put on. But Dorothy only smiled and nodded brightly: she felt perfectly secure in the love of Dean Hastings, after that sweet whisper.

Each of these three people, when once in the open air, went their way homeward in the mellow and bright October sunshine. But not before Miss Lawrence had detained Dean Hastings for a chat.

"Are you particularly engaged this afternoon, Mr. Hastings?"

"Yes, I am. I am going out of town at once to see a sick friend, and shall not be back before nine o'clock."

"Nine o'clock?" she repeated, musingly. "Well, that will be time enough. Papa wishes to see you, if you can call."

"But I—oh, very well," broke off Mr. Hastings. "Tell him, if you please, that I will endeavour to come."

Within the shade of her own chamber, Annabella Lawrence threw off her hat, and grasped at the lace collar around her throat as if it were choking her. She paced up and down; then, pausing before the pier-glass, she bent forward and looked at herself long and earnestly. Her dark hair was silky, her black eyes flashed fire.

"Youth and beauty," she murmured. "It is said that youth and beauty will work wonders for their possessor. But what have they done for me? They cannot win for me the love I need; the love he gives to that pale, spiritless working-girl. Ah! it makes me sick to think of her! I *know* he cares for her—and does he think I do not see that he cares not for me? It is her fault. But for her, he would turn to me and love me. Oh, Dean, Dean, I love you! Why do you not see it?—or do you see it, and yet will not respond to it?"

She threw her arms up with a passionate gesture of sorrow: and then bent her head on her hands in pain.

"If I find—if I find," she resumed, lifting her pale face, "that he cares for her seriously—that he neglects me for her, I swear that both shall suffer—he as well as she. I—swear—it!"

Anything more vindictive than the tone of her emphatic words, than the expression of her pale face, was never seen or heard. Bella Lawrence was not a girl to be crossed lightly. Her face, sufficiently beautiful when she was at rest, or in her tender moods, was half diabolical now. Her great dark eyes flashed fiercely, a hot flush burned on her soft, round, olive cheeks, and through her full red lips her sharp-pointed white teeth gleamed craftily. It was no fable that in her school-days she had been nicknamed "the Cat," and that her companions had given her full credit for all a cat's spiteful nature when angered. She and Dorothy Stevens had been educated at the same school: the one was a rich heiress, the other was to be only a governess. Dora was in a family now, and Miss Lawrence condescended to speak to her now and then when they met.

Bella walked to the window, and stood looking thoughtfully out. What a lovely scene it was! The house stood on the outskirts of the town; hill and vale lay stretched out before her, and waving woodlands tinted with autumn's unrivalled colours. Along the line of the river, spires and clustered chimneys marked the site of her father's factories—mile-stones on the road to wealth. "It is all mine," she murmured. "It will be mine in time, and I would give it all to him with this"—lifting her hand. "I would give it to him, and he rejects it."

Yes: if Miss Lawrence could read signs, Dean Hastings would reject her hand were it offered him. But she was not sure; not quite. Again her quick mood changed. The flush died out of her cheeks, and tears crowded into her proud, dark eyes. "Dean, Dean, I would give you the tenderest, truest love a woman ever proffered. Oh, why do you despise it?"

And yet, who was Dean Hastings? Nobody. He was a gentleman by birth, it's true, but he had no means save what he earned as one of the chief clerks in this very factory—that of Lawrence and Lawrence. His cousin was a baronet in an adjoining county; and Dean was in the best society that Richborough afforded.

"So absurd, so incongruous," thought Bella, "for him to notice that stupid governess!—Who's that?" she rather sharply cried out as a tap was heard at the door. "Oh, what do you want, Pauline?"

The lunch waited. So Miss Lawrence went down with finger on lip. Her mind was hard at work.

Do you think the father of all wickedness is in league with such of his children as would forward his evil designs on earth? Does he make the way smooth for them when they abandon themselves to working out their fierce passions of hatred and revenge? Our forefathers used to believe in these alliances of earth and the devil; and we are at times fain to believe that if the devil be not in league against us, the good angel who we love to think watches over us is at times far off—very, very far.

The clock was striking nine that night when Dean Hastings was shown in. Bella received him in a small favourite apartment that she often sat in, and liked best. The fittings were of pink silk and lace, the ornaments scattered about it were rarely beautiful. Mr. Lawrence was out. For that little command of her father's, transmitted to Dean in the morning, had been an invented fable of her own.

She held out her hand to him, and bade him take a chair near her. His handsome eyes were fixed deferentially on her face as he obeyed: but there was no warmth in them; there was not one shadow of tenderness towards her in his manner. Bella's heart grew faint and her lips cold: but still she hoped against hope; she would not give up all without a struggle. This night should decide the uncertainty; leave her to happiness or to despair.

The interview lasted about half an hour: and what passed between them was never known. Probably, in her desperation, Annabella Lawrence let him gather unmistakably that her love was his—and she did love him with all the terrible passion of her fierce nature: and he on his side may have allowed her to see that he could not accept it. He may even have hinted to her that his true affections were given to Miss Stevens, the poor girl-governess, so unjustifiably despised by the great heiress. Any way, when Dean Hastings quitted the rich merchant's house that night, Bella knew that her hopes of happiness were over, that despair had set in. She resolved to live henceforth only for revenge.

Annabella had seen a good deal of Mr. Hastings. It cannot be denied that he paid her some attention; that he met her advances, if not half way, at least a part of it. But he never cast a thought to anything serious; that great heiress, his master's daughter, was not for him to aspire to; and it was only lately, when he had begun

to detect somewhat of her true feelings for him, that he had drawn in, and become cold to her with a purpose. Between that time and this, he had met Dorothy Stevens ; and learnt to love her. And now, in her bitter heart, Miss Lawrence was striving to hate him as much as she had loved him. She believed he had deliberately played her false : and, as Shakespeare tells us, Hell has no fury like a woman scorned.

But she did him injustice there. Mr. Hastings had never felt love for her, or sought to make her think he did. Of an extremely modest, un-self-asserting nature, good-looking though he was, he had deemed that Miss Lawrence had but flirted with him, *amused* herself with him, just as she did with a host of other young men : and so the misapprehension had gone on, and was bringing trouble in its train.

Her hair pushed back, her heart beating with all its tumultuous and varied passions, Bella sat on after Mr. Hastings left. The loud opening and closing of the street door, and a swift footstep on the stairs, aroused her. It was her cousin who entered, one Richard Lawrence ; a young man of nine-and-twenty, who lived with them. He had a small share in the business, and he hoped, by dint of playing his cards well, to succeed to it after Mr. Lawrence.

Mr. Richard also hoped to succeed to something else—Miss Lawrence. He did not love her ; but he did love her money, for the ruling passion of his heart was avarice. If he loved one person more than another, it was pretty Dora Stevens ; her golden hair and sweet blue eyes were wont to haunt him as he sat in the counting-house over his account-books. But he said nothing to her, and meant nothing : a poor governess could never be the wife for him : he wanted one endowed with the mines of Golconda.

He and his cousin Bella understood one another. That is, *she* understood *him*. She saw that he wanted her for his wife on account of her money ; she knew how abject (with this aim in view) a slave he was to her, how he bent before all her whims and caprices, and that she could turn him round her little finger. On his part, he suspected her fancy for Dean Hastings ; *fancy*, he thought it, nothing more ; but he was outrageously jealous of that, and there were moments when he wished he could see that gentleman hanging on the nearest tree ; ay, and could have helped to hang him.

Richard Lawrence did not love Mr. Hastings on his own score. He was a little West Indian fellow, with a dark face and ungenial manner : whereas Hastings was one of the best-looking of men, and charmed everybody ; the result being that while the one was courted in society, the other often found the cold shoulder turned upon him. And thus Richard Lawrence was prime for any little bit of by-play against Hastings that might be proposed to him. Not that he expected any such proposal ; nothing could be farther from his thoughts. It came, nevertheless.

“Why—what is the matter, Annabella ?”

It was the face of his cousin that called forth the exclamation Bella passed her soft cambric handkerchief across her brow.

"It's that wretched Hastings. He has been here insulting me."

"What!" cried Richard, angrily rising.

And Miss Bella Lawrence entered upon a graphic tale. Some little truth there was in it, but the greater portion was the concoction of her own fertile brain. Hastings had dared to talk of love to her, she hinted, while he had unconsciously betrayed that he was playing fast and loose with Dora Stevens—villain that he was. And there was nothing for it but his being sent instantly out of Richborough.

"Instantly!" exclaimed Richard, lifting his head. "But, Bella, I don't think he can be spared."

"As you please, Dick. I do care for him a little—and perhaps you know that I do. Let him remain here, and I won't answer for what may happen. Some fine morning you and papa may find he has run away with me. He is audacious enough for that, or anything else; and women like audacity in men, you know."

Richard Lawrence knitted his brows.

"As to that governess girl, he no doubt fully intends to kidnap *her*, whether or not; she's nobody: provided he can keep the knowledge of it from me. Wives don't care to hear of these things, you see. I have sometimes thought you liked the girl a little bit yourself, Richard."

"She's a nice, pleasant little girl enough," said Richard. "Honest as the day, and worthy."

"And friendless," added Bella, with quite a display of benevolent feeling. "Well, Richard, for her sake you should banish him."

"Let me think it out," said Richard. "I hardly see how it is to be done. Your father leaves a great deal of control to me, but he does not leave all. And—and how long is he to go for?"

"For good," answered Bella, passionately. "As I cannot have him, *she* shall not," she added to herself; and her face for the moment wore the fierceness of a tiger's. "Why can't you send him out to our cotton plantations in Barbadoes, Richard?"

"Because—because—I don't know why. It has never been thought of, Bella; he has been too useful where he is."

"Has anyone gone out to take the place of the chief clerk there, who died?"

"Not yet. Proctor is partly promised it."

Their eyes met. Proctor was the clerk immediately under Hastings: why not substitute the one for the other? It was the question that Richard was reading in her fixed look.

"I would; I'd be glad to be rid of the fellow," said Richard, answering the gaze. "But these appointments do not lie with me. Your father has always made them. Hush! here he comes."

Mr. Lawrence came in slowly. In walking across the room to an easy chair, Bella saw that he limped.

"Are you not well, papa?"

"Anything but that, I am afraid, my dear. I am in for a fit of the gout again, unless I greatly mistake. My foot has given me twinges all day; and now I can hardly bear it. Remember one thing, Richard: if I do get laid up, you must not bother me as you did last time, bringing all sorts of trifles to me—you must act for yourself. You are as capable as I am."

A faint sound of exultation, suppressed instantly, broke from Bella's lips. This threatened illness, this extension of power to Richard, seemed to be happening on purpose.

Surely the devil did appear to be in league with these good people! For with the morning Mr. Lawrence was plunged deep into an agonising fit of the gout, could not leave his bed, and his servants were running all over Richborough for the most able physicians.

"Is that you, Mr. Hastings? Come here."

The speaker was Richard Lawrence. He sat in the post of honour in the counting-house; and Dean, as he entered, in obedience to the mandate, saw it with some surprise; for that place belonged only to the head and chief.

"You are a little late this morning."

"I am; it is a quarter past nine," replied Dean, good-humouredly. "Truth is, I got an important letter from an old college chum, and waited to answer it."

"Ay; one generally gets hindered at the wrong moment," observed Richard, with a pleasant smile. "I want you to get off to the station and take the ten o'clock train for Liverpool."

"Are you joking, Lawrence?"

"Not a bit of it. There's something wrong about the cargo of cotton just in, and you must go down to see about it. I should have gone myself but for the governor's illness. He is in for a fit of the gout again, and I must stay here to take his place."

Dean's face wore a blank look. "I wish I had known of this before."

"No doubt. I knew nothing about it till the letters got in this morning. The governor ordered me not to bother him with trifles, but I thought he ought to know something about this. 'As you can't go yourself,' said he, 'you must send Hastings down. Let him be off by the first train.' So you have no time to lose, you see."

Yes, his Satanic Majesty was certainly at work; for it was a positive fact that this news about the cargo of cotton was no fable, and that somebody had to go to Liverpool. Apart from any scheming, that somebody would probably have been Dean Hastings.

"When the sun sets be at the stile by the cross road."

It was this remembered sentence which was troubling his mind. Dora would go to the trysting place this evening, and go in

vain. Legitimate communication between herself and him was difficult at all times; but now he had no time to plan for or risk it. He glanced at the clock hanging over the desk. No; there was just time for him to dash home to his lodgings, tumble a few things into a portmanteau, and dash up to the station.

"Well, I suppose I must be off, then," said he. "What are my instructions?"

"I am writing them down for you."

Perhaps the word "writing" inspired Dean with an idea; or perhaps it was the little delay. Seizing paper and pen, he began a note to Dora. Then he hesitated, wondering how he should get it conveyed to her. His head seemed in a whirl—an unusual thing. Richard was writing fast, and the noise worried him. Scratch! scratch! Tick! tick! How that horrid clock hurried the minutes away. If he could only stop it. If he could only put out his hand and stop those bits of steel which were whirling his time away so fast. If he could only stop time itself. But no! Then another idea struck him; and he wrote rapidly and fastened up the note.

"Here," said Richard, handing him a folded paper, with some money. "Good luck to you; Hastings, and don't lose more time."

Richard seemed so gracious at that moment, that Dean was wondering whether he might not trust him with the note's delivery—the idea which had been floating with uncertainty through his mind. He looked at him, then glanced at the note, and looked again.

"Can I do anything for you?" asked Richard, blandly.

"Well, you can, Lawrence. I think I can trust you; though I am truly sorry to give you the trouble. You know the Callows well—and Dorothy Stevens the governess: if you'd not mind calling there and putting this into her hand privately, I should be truly obliged."

"All right," said Richard, holding out his hand for the note.

"But you must let her have it before five o'clock this afternoon: that's indispensable."

Richard Lawrence nodded as he slipped the note into his pocket. And Dean Hastings made all speed for the train.

"Tell Mr. Lawrence how sorry I am that he is ill," he waited to say. "I hope he will soon be up again."

As to Richard, he found a minute to run to Miss Lawrence to report progress; and he showed her the note.

"I'll undertake that," said Bella. "Give it to me."

It used to be the fashion in novels of the Rosa Matilda school to represent young governesses as beings of incomparable beauty, safe to cause havoc in the heart of the house's eldest son and heir, and trouble to everybody else in consequence. Now this had absolutely happened in the case of Dorothy Stevens—although she could not boast of much beauty, save in her fine golden hair and

sweet blue eyes, and, it may be, in an innocent, confiding expression of countenance. Upon leaving school a situation had been found for her in the house of Mrs. Calloway: a rigid gentleman who boasted of high descent: to conduct the education of an only daughter. There was an only son as well, much older; twenty-one in fact; and he fell forthwith in love with the governess's pretty eyes and hair, after the alleged custom of these half-fledged youngsters. For a long while Mrs. Calloway suspected not the treason hatching in her son's heart: and she, confiding woman, continued to have Miss Stevens down to the drawing-room whenever she received evening guests; for the young lady, don't you see, was useful in the matter of playing and singing. Now and then Dorothy went out with them also; always when the daughter went. It was in these social evening gatherings that Mr. Hastings had seen her and learnt to love her; and she, poor girl, had no notion that anybody else did. Young Mr. Calloway, who was of a bashful, nervous temperament, kept his sentiments to himself, and did not annoy Dora: she only used to wonder why he stared at her so, and wished he would not. But one unlucky day he came to the desperate resolution of declaring his love, and penned a letter describing it. By some awkward mischance it fell into the possession of Mrs. Calloway instead of that of the governess; and a fine hubbub it caused. Dora, with earnest words and tearful eyes, protested that she had been in utter ignorance of the treason; and Mrs. Calloway, believing it in her secret heart, and not caring to part with her, kept her on: but she spoke to her in very severe terms, and candidly avowed she should exercise a rigid espionage over her in future. Dora agreed to that willingly. She was conscious of no ill: moreover, she was a friendless orphan, and feared to throw herself out of Mrs. Calloway's situation, lest she should not find another. Young Mr. Calloway was sent to the care of a clergyman at a distance, to read up for the Church, which he was to enter.

From that time, Dora found herself next kin to a prisoner. No more evening parties for her, no more social meetings. Mrs. Calloway even exercised the right (she said she possessed it) of opening her letters. Dora made no objection: she had never had but one letter since she entered the house, and that was from her former governess.

"Characters are much easier lost than regained amidst young people who have to earn their bread; and I consider it my duty to take care of yours," Mrs. Calloway observed to her by way of semi-apology; and Dora thought she was right (as no doubt she was) and thanked her kindly.

But all this put a great barrier between her and Mr. Hastings—at least, between their meetings. He thought it was Dora's fault, and a slight coolness had arisen in consequence. He felt inclined to be jealous of Mr. Charles Calloway, whose cause of banishment had

reached him, though not through Dora; and she had always been somewhat jealous of the great heiress, Miss Lawrence, with whom Mr. Hastings was so frequently seen. Still, she did trust him; she believed he loved her the best, and that when he was rich enough to marry he would make her his wife, as he one day told her he would. She, in her unpretentious ideas, thought he was quite rich enough now for anything; he had a large salary; but she and Mr. Hastings had been brought up with quite opposite notions on that point.

"When the sun sets be at the stile at the cross road," he had whispered in her ear. Evening came: and just as the sun was sinking below the western hills, Dora Stevens crossed Mrs. Calloway's garden to the copse beyond. For the trysting-place was but just behind Mrs. Calloway's boundary hedge. It was the first time Dora had deliberately met him, there or elsewhere; but a few evenings before, upon returning from a walk with Miss Calloway, they had accidentally encountered him at that spot, and stayed to talk. But Dora felt rather sorry now for the tacit assent she had given to his request; she gave it on the impulse of the moment; and she meant to tell him this evening that she could not meet him again, unless openly. It was not right to do so; neither would Mrs. Calloway allow it.

Nevertheless, despite of conscience, her heart was foolishly light as she sped along through the rustling leaves. She sang lightly some pretty silly nonsense about the lasses oh, which one Robert Burns wrote many years ago; wrote perchance in days when he too sat by the stile with his Highland Mary, and watched the birds hopping in the stubble, or the poppies nodding in the corn.

Dora, as she drew near the trysting-place, saw a shadow as of some one waiting near the stile, half hidden by the tangled branches of the copse, thick yet with leaves above and below.

No need to guess who it was, thought Dora, as she pulled her pretty hat lower on her face, and pushed back her prettier hair. How *good* of him to come so early and wait for her. Suddenly a voice spoke; not the voice that Dora had expected to hear.

"Dean, *is* it you? Have you come back?"

The voice was that of Miss Lawrence. It was Bella Lawrence who confronted Dora's pale, surprised face with a face quite as surprised and a great deal whiter—for it was a hazardous game she was playing—and with a perfectly studied confusion in her manner.

"Oh, I—I beg your pardon: I thought it was some one else," spoke Miss Lawrence, "some one who was to meet me here."

Dora paused. Hot tears of disappointment, which she could not suppress, flooded her eyes and dropped on her white cheeks.

"You here, Miss Lawrence?" she said, with struggling breath. "I don't understand. Did you speak of—of Mr. Hastings?" for a terrible fear had rushed into her mind: that it was Bella with whom he had sought to make the appointment, not herself.

"You must not betray me," whispered Bella, with the sweetest air of timidity imaginable. "You know my father is so proud, and Dean is only his clerk—but he loves me so—and we have so few opportunities to meet. You must not blame me, Miss Stevens, or think harshly of me for coming here at times to meet him. We shall not always have to be secret: when I am of age my late mother's money will be all my own, and then we can claim each other. He told me this morning he might be unable to keep his appointment, for he was going off on some business journey; but I—I hoped against hope, and came. And when I heard your footsteps, I thought they were his. Ah, me!"

Bella clasped her soft hands together in deprecation and bent her head on them as she spoke; and Dorothy Stevens listened with wide, wild eyes, while word following after word of that cruel lie fell on her quivering heart and smote her with a deathly cold pain, whose sting would cling to her. And the words were fitly chosen. The girl's allusion to her money cut keenly and closely: Dora bit her lips to keep from crying out then. She was only a poor governess; her only dowry her tender heart and sweet wild-rose face, and her great absorbing love for the man who was false to her.

Without one word she rose and turned to go, but Bella caught her by the arm and held her.

"Wait, please: how strange you are! Why do you look so wildly at me? You won't betray us; promise me that you will not betray us."

Dora drew proudly back. "I never betray. You have my word. I never broke it yet! I—I am sorry I came."

"Why *did* you come? This is so unfrequented a pathway."

A cry, in spite of herself, broke from the poor girl's lips. There are moments in life when anguish is stronger than we are, when reticence is overborne in its whirling torrent.

"Oh, Heaven, help me to bear this pain!" she sobbed; and down she fell in a heap on the grass, and bowed her fair golden head, and rocked herself back and forth, with wild hysterical sobs, in spite of those cruel, unrelenting eyes above her.

"What do you mean by this emotion?" asked Bella, sternly. "What is the matter? Is it possible—but no, it cannot be. Yet he has more than once hinted of a something that might come between him and me—some irksome, half-forgotten, passing amusement that clung to him like an incubus, though he was doing his best to shake it off. Is it you? Can it be you, you ridiculous girl?"

Dora rose up, her face white as death, and lifted a warning hand.

"Stop, Miss Lawrence. I will not hear another word. I do not stand between you and your false lover; yes, he *is* false, in spite of what he says to you, false and cowardly. You need not fear me. I will never come between him and you. You need not fear him. I have no money to keep him, and he is free from all he has said to

me. I will never speak to him again; never. You can tell him so from me. Never again."

With the last words Dora turned away, passed into the grounds, and ran swiftly home. But not very long had Miss Lawrence reached her father's house, before Dora was shown into her room. Pale, wild-eyed, a shawl wrapped about her, Dora put down a letter. A hasty, blotted, fiercely-written letter; a letter written in that passionate hour—oh, how cruelly, and likely, after it was received, to put all the wide world between her and her lover. For when girls are stung into madness, they do all kinds of incomprehensible things, never sparing those who have injured them.

"It is my renouncement!" Dora panted. "I thought I would bring it to you, and you would send it to him, as you know where he is gone. Bid him never answer it. Let him never in honour speak to me again—never look at me. Fare you well, Miss Lawrence. I wish you both well."

Mr. Richard Lawrence did not do his work by halves. In spite of Mr. Lawrence's gout and his confinement to the counting-house, he found time to run down to Liverpool and talk over some arrangements with Dean Hastings. And the very next day Richborough heard that Mr. Hastings had sailed for the West Indies. Some complications had arisen out there in the cotton fields, and Mr. Hastings was gone to set them to rights.

Meanwhile, Miss Lawrence paid a friendly visit to Mrs. Calloway; during which she imparted a few hints of that designing Dorothy Stevens' wickedness, in wanting to come between her and a gentleman to whom she was privately engaged. Mrs. Calloway lifted her hands and eyes, and readily promised that if any letters came for Miss Stevens (unless in the handwriting of her infatuated son, of whom she did not feel assured yet) they should be sent intact to the heiress.

And Dora, finding herself looked upon with suspicion at Mrs. Calloway's, treated coldly, yearning to get away from Richborough, the scene of her misery, besought that lady to find her a situation at a distance. Mrs. Calloway seized upon the idea, and lost no time in doing it; but she made a stipulation with the girl that she should not disclose to Richborough where her new home was, or give her address.

"Indeed I will not," acquiesced the poor girl, all too readily. "I shall never care to see Richborough again, or to hear of it."

Dean Hastings was ploughing his way on the treacherous ocean: and of the two women he left behind it would be difficult to say which of their lives was the most desolate, wanting him; for when Dora's angry passion was over, the first sharp sting of his falsehood and his desertion past, then her tenderness returned. Night by night she bent in prayer for him at her bedside: "Lord, watch over him and protect him! Help him, and keep him from all harm."

Mr. Hastings landed in safety. The first packet of letters he received from home contained that angry one of renouncement, written by Dora. Not that it betrayed anger; only a calm, studied coldness. Opening mechanically the letter that lay next to it, he found it in the handwriting of Miss Lawrence. This letter chiefly contained items of news, written in a playful style: one of them ran as follows. "Will you be surprised to hear that Mrs. Calloway has at length given in to the persistency of the young people? Report says they are about to be married shortly. Do not break your heart: Dorothy Stevens is not worth it. It is very wrong of her to be so much given to flirting—worse than I am: and that, perhaps you will say, need not be."

The time went on; two years of it. Dean Hastings had left soon the employ of Mr. Lawrence and entered that of another house in the West Indies, connected with Richborough. News was heard of him but rarely; but at the end of the two years tidings came. Bad tidings, worse than had ever come before. He had died of yellow fever.

Close upon that, Annabella Lawrence gave her hand to her cousin. Her ill-starred passion, already nearly dead, dead of its very hopelessness, was now thrust away from her heart for ever. She entered upon her reign, as queen of society, heartless, callous, self-indulgent—but so she always had been.

But what of Dora Stevens? She was more isolated in her new home than she had been at Mrs. Calloway's; but she quietly did her duty in it. Her heart unconsciously remained true to its first love. She did not *hope*; that would be saying too much; but she did believe that all must be at an end between Dean and Miss Lawrence—else why had he not come home to claim her? But one day, upon taking up the *Richborough Gazette*, she read in it the death of Dean Hastings, of yellow fever—aged twenty-eight.

Until then she had not realised how great a part in her heart's life he had filled. Folding her hands, she wept lonely and bitter tears.

"When the sun sets." Can you picture that solitary girl's figure standing in the sunset that same evening, her hand shading her eyes, and gazing out over the sea in imagination towards the spot where her once fond lover lay in an alien grave. Look at her. The sunlight rests on the hill-tops behind, but she stands in shadow.

"I loved him," she cries in passionate remembrance. "I loved him; and—I—believe he once loved me. I love him still. Did he die thinking I was false to him? Oh, can there be anything in life or death more cruel than that?"

Her hands are lifted to her brow, as if to press down its throbbing. The pain there seems more than she can bear.

"Do you think he knows now?" she goes on, lifting her aching eyes as if in imaginary appeal to the gold and amethyst clouds left by the sunset. "Are all things made plain in that other world?—are all the cruel mysteries that perplex us here, the misunderstandings and the sorrows, made plain at last?"

Ah, who can tell her? Who knows?

Some three weeks, it might have been, after this, that Dora received a small, delicately-papered packet. It contained wedding-cake and cards: Mr. and Mrs. Richard Lawrence."

"She has lost no time," mused Dora that same evening, when, her duties over for the day, she stood in her favourite spot beyond the laurels, under the sunset. "No time if she was waiting for *him*. Oh, I wonder how it all was? Did he love her?—But, why ask it?—to what end now? She is here, beginning her wedded life; and he—lies *there*."

It appeared, however, if she spoke of Dean Hastings (as she undoubtedly did), that he did not lie there. He was at her elbow. His footsteps fell softly over the grass, and she did not see or hear him until he came round the laurels.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Stevens. I took the liberty of calling at the house to ask for you, and an old servant told me you had come out here."

She did not faint; but she did scream. Yes, it was Dean Hastings, looking ill and shadowy.

"Is it yourself?" she gasped. "We thought you were dead."

"But I did not die, Dorothy. I was given over in the yellow fever; and somehow or other my death got reported here, I find."

"And what have you come over for?" she asked, all in a tremble of confusion.

"Various odds and ends of matters. To get up my strength, for one thing; and to settle down at Richborough, for I am not going back; and to marry you, if you will have me."

"Oh, Mr. Hastings!"

"I have heard a word or two dropped from one and another at Richborough, Dorothy, for it is there that I have stayed since I landed; and I begin to think that you and I had some false friends. You are not yet Mrs. Charles Calloway——"

"Oh!" put in Dorothy.

"Stay a bit, my dear. And I am not yet the husband of Miss Lawrence. She has taken another, by the way. So—do you see any reason why we should not take one another? No impediment exists now, my darling; I am in a good position; a partner of the house I am in; and can set up our tent well. Dora, what do you say? You *know*, at least you ought to know, that I never would have married anyone but you."

What did she say? Nothing. She yielded herself to the arms held out to her, and bent her face down on the true-hearted, sheltering breast, happy sobs, joyful tears, bedewing it. Oh, how merciful was God!

The sun went down behind the hills in a blaze of glory. Its last lingering rays of crimson and purple fell upon them as they stood together in happiness.

HIS GUARDIAN ANGEL.

* * * * *

THEY drew back, shrinking and fearful, as he passed by the little crowd gathering about the church whose bell was calling to vespers. The women shivered as they glanced in the dark strange face, and whispered that, handsome as it was, there was an evil spirit in him. A wild, gloomy, fell face indeed, in which sorrow and passion and a dire purpose had set their seal, never to be softened save by one thing; never to be broken save by one hand.

Is he searching for some one, that he half pauses as he comes on and looks, with his great gleaming black eyes, from face to face of the passing groups? If so, he is ever searching, for they say that he always has that look—and he has been long enough about the voisinage of Verbois-sur-Loire for them to notice that, and to know his name, Count Max de St. Mar. But who he is, or what his history, and why he haunted the place, no one knew, and none cared to ask the gloomy, lonely stranger, who came and went, silent, solitary, and watchful.

A heavy frown darkens that strange, handsome face now, as he sees how afraid of him they are. The tall, slight form shivers as he passes swiftly on, shunning the church and people—on, on, towards the wooded banks of the fast-flowing Loire.

What is he? who is he? To what strange story is that gloomy, suffering, passionate face an index? Is he a reckless dare-devil? Is there the doom of a dark deed upon him? Or is he hugging close a great vengeance which is eating out heart and soul, and forging, each hour, a new link to the chain which binds him to the Gates of Darkness?

What sound is it that meets his ear as he moves on, with a step now slow and weary? Not the chanting from the church away behind him; not the ceaseless rush of the waters before him. No, the rich, soft tones, mellow and full as the nightingale's note, of a girlish voice singing—to herself, it seemed. He knew the sweet melody, and started to hear the words so distinctly.

"Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis."

Yet he paused as if fascinated, till the last soft cadence died away. Then he pushed aside the branches of the trees, and came out upon the river bank.

There she sat with a lap full of flowers, a beautiful golden-haired child, for she scarcely numbered sixteen years, with great, dreamy, loving eyes, and an exquisite Madonna face.

Light as his step was, she heard it and turned. Would she too

shrink and fly? did she too know his name and whisper that he was possessed and cast in shadow? and if so, was it not true? Had he not hidden his cross away twenty years ago, and clasped a devil to his breast instead? nestled the dark thing into his very heart so close that his Guardian Angel had lost all hold save one frail thread of gold?

No, she does not shrink; but as his tall, slight figure comes between her and the waters, she looks up in his face and smiles, half in sweet childlike recognition, half with the deep tender pity that an angel's face might wear. Involuntarily the gloomy stranger paused, in very wonder that she too did not shrink from his glance.

"Child, art thou weaving offerings to the river god!" he said, pointing to the flowers—and the deep voice was full of music.

"Ah, no; they would die," said the girl, shaking her golden head. "Some—these white flowers—are for the church, not these roses. Will Monsieur accept this one?"

The little fingers picked out the most beautiful moss-rose, and offered it. "You will not be robbing la Sainte Vierge, M. de St. Mar?"

He took the rose gravely, and laying his hand lightly on her head, said:

"She would not say thee nay if *thou* gathered them, my child."

Somehow it came naturally to his lips to call her child. She was so very young and fair, and he full twenty years older, with lines on his brow, and grey hairs straying amongst his coal-black locks.

"How is it," he added, suddenly, "that you do not fear me like the others?"

The blue eyes looked up wonderingly. "Fear you! Oh, no, I am only sorry for you."

Sorry for him! Was he dreaming? Why should this pure being be sorry for him? The flash of light in the black darkness of his soul dazzled him.

He had placed the rose in his breast; now he folded his arms tightly. Did the fell thing that lay there coiled so closely quiver and tremble at the soft voice that stole from far off to its jealous ear.

"Not afraid—sorry," he repeated, looking down on her. "Child, what do they call you?"

"M. le Comte, they call me La Cora."

"A sweet name; but thou art no peasant-born girl, Cora."

"Peasant; oh, no," she said, smiling. "No more than M. de St. Mar."

"How know you who or what I am?" he said quickly.

"I only know Monsieur's name."

"Do you live among the fairies, Cora?"

The girl smiled again and answered, No, she was living with M. le Curé, her dead mother's brother.

The dark strange man stood looking down on the child. "Belle

petite, voilà votre rose ; know you what it means in Flora's graceful language ? ”

“ It means love, M. le Comte.”

“ Love ! ” he repeated, half aloud in Italian, with such bitter emphasis that the child shivered ; “ never more for me. Lost, lost ! sold for the one thing left me : the demon I have hugged till naught else is left to Max de St. Mar.”

“ Naught else but what, signor mio ? ” said the child's pitying tones in the softest Etruscan.

The man started back. “ Nothing, child ! nothing. Take back the rose, it is not for me.”

But the little fingers stayed his hand ere it could take the flower from his breast. “ Pover' infelice ! wear it, and when it is dead La Cora will give you another.”

The slender, white-robed form glided away through the trees. Was it a child hovering on the confines between girl and womanhood, or was it an angel or a vision ? No, there nestled the rose in his breast, there in his ear still lingered the deep pathetic pity and sorrow in those two words, “ Pover' infelice.”

“ Away ! away ! it is too late ! ” came his awful cry ; “ naught is left but the power of vengeance ! body and soul have paid the price, and they are lost. Ha ! what then, when mine is the vengeance ! ” Was it a dream or a fancy that he heard as from afar that child's voice, like distant music, whisper back like the echo of other years, “ Vengeance is MINE, I will repay, saith the Lord.”

With a stifled cry the man of fell purpose fled away from the spot ; but the rose still lay on his breast

Had his guardian angel, clinging yet to the one frail thread left, breathed its heavenly mission into that young, pure human heart, and left her to work it out ? It might have been so, for from that time the miserable, gloomy man, wrapped in the very darkness of his great sin, sought her out, or let her seek him—he could scarce have said which it was. Day after day they would stray together through the woods, or by the river-bank, or often cross it in her little boat and wander on the other side ; she—the pure, innocent girl who had read him, yet never shrunk, always sprang joyously to meet him. M. le Curé, good, guileless old man, had been fearful at first, but she had whispered a word in his ear that made him smile and bid her “ God speed, then,” and the simple villagers, when they saw the strangely-matched pair pass, came at last to say, crossing themselves, that “ Heaven had sent La Cora, and neither man nor devil could harm her.” Perhaps there was more truth in their ignorant, beautiful faith, half superstitious though it might be, than wiser heads have fathomed.

One day she had wandered down first to the bank where, now dark and quiet, the stately Loire flowed more gently ; in vain the golden-headed Cora stood ready by the little boat and called aloud, “ Cher M. Max, je suis à vous.”

For once M. de St. Mar was late, and the child pushed off, keeping, however, within hail; but as she turned the boat's head, a voice called across from the opposite bank, for the river was narrow there, "Holà ! is that Verbois ?"

A man was standing on the bank, and La Cora, tuning her voice so as to throw it well across without any effort to herself, answered :

"Oui, Monsieur, c'est Verbois-sur-Loire."

"Eh bien ! And how am I to get to it ? I have lost my way, somehow."

"Monsieur can cross three miles below this at Aumône."

"Unless," called the stranger, pleasantly, "Mademoiselle would allow me the honour of pulling across in the boat. I am weary, for I am fifty years old and have walked far."

"I will ferry Monsieur over."

He threw himself on the turf and watched the pretty boat as it came swiftly on under the skilled, steady pull of the young girl, but the moment the boat's nose touched he rose and stepped down.

"How can I thank you, my child ? Permit me to relieve you."*

"No, thank you. Sit down, Monsieur, if you please ; my boat knows me best."

For now that she saw him close the child preferred to keep the mastery of the situation. His face was such a one as few would take on trust, for all its smiling front and grey hairs.

Glancing round presently, she thought she saw the tall form she had never been so glad to see as now, pass along towards some noble trees right down by the water's edge ; if so, he paused, looked towards the boat, and suddenly disappeared behind the trees.

A little faster the child's heart beat, and she instantly headed for those very trees, rejoicing that M. de St. Mar was there, that when she landed her passenger she would not be alone with him. Oh ! that wonderful instinct of womanhood, which a loving Father has implanted for her protection in the heart of the youngest, the most innocent, the most trusting.

She sprang to shore quickly and fastened the boat tightly to a sapling, as the slower stranger set foot on land.

In that moment St. Mar stepped suddenly forward face to face with the stranger, and the child started to see a pistol in his right hand, and a look in the face she loved such as might well strike terror into her and the man before him ; such desperate, passionate hatred, such fierce, blazing wrath, such a deep, relentless purpose, that the stranger shrunk in abject terror, and Cora laid her little trembling hand, never yet repulsed, on St. Mar's arm. He put her sternly back.

"At last, at last, I have the devil incarnate in my power. Turn to fly, stir a step, and you die five minutes sooner ! You, whom I have sought for twenty years ; you, who escaped justice, shall not elude me. Where is my only, my twin brother ? the boy whose innocence you poisoned ; whom you dragged into your own vices, into sin, step

by step; and when he tried madly to free himself, taunted him, till in his misery—ha! you know it was not suicide, it was murder, murder on your own head, and with body and soul you shall pay the ransom!”

But in the very second that he fired, the weapon was struck up and hurled into the rolling waters by a girl's slight hand.

“The boat!” she cried. “Thou murderer—fly! For his own soul's sake he shall leave vengeance to God. Fly!”

“Child, back, back, or ——”

He was springing desperately on his foe, but the child threw herself on his breast, wrapping her arms around him with a strength he could not loosen without using cruel force; and the boat shot out into the stream.

“Loose thy hold, Cora! Thou hast let my brother's murderer escape my vengeance,” he cried, with a fierce wrath which seemed as if it would fain shatter even this frail loved form to reach his end.

But she was weeping bitterly now. “Oh, Max! I have but saved thy soul from death, from the awful stain of blood. See,”—loosing her clasp only to cling as closely to his arm—“he is gone, and will never more cross thy path.”

He looked down on her beautiful face with his wild gleaming eyes.

“Child, you have done me a bitter wrong. For twenty long years have I nourished this just vengeance, lived on it, my only hope, my all; dreamed, brooded, fed on it, till all else vanished before it; earth and heaven, body and soul were flung into the scale! I sold everything in this world and the next for this one jewel, and you, you whom I loved, rob me of it!”

“The jewel was false,” said the child, shaking her golden head. “The fruit was from the Dead Sea; the vengeance is God's, not yours.”

“Not mine!” He stopped, choked by the force of his own passions.

The soft voice came again.

“Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord; cast out the evil spirit from thy breast, and wear instead this Cross of Christ.” And next the rose of her love she laid the golden crucifix she wore.

But he started back with a cry of horror. “Take it back, I dare not touch it! Too late, too late! take it away, child! I have cast hope and cross behind me far too long.”

“Oh, hush thee! hush thee, Max! for Christ hath not forgotten the soul for which He died. He surely sent thy Cora this day to stay thy hand from blood-guiltiness, and win thee back to Him.”

“Child, child, close indeed hast thou stolen into this seared heart, but the demon is there still. I cannot give up; it is too late. Leave me; I am lost to all but vengeance.”

Out of the deep eyes uplifted to his troubled face looked the very

spirit of his guardian angel, and the sweet voice answered: "Even at the eleventh hour it is not too late. I will not leave thee, Max; never till my mission is finished, and thy tear of repentance hath fallen at the foot of the Cross. Then, if thou wilt, I will see thy face no more."

The serpent quivered and trembled for its hold, as he stooped and kissed that pure brow with deep, grave reverence; then suffered the little clinging hand to lead him away.

The good old Curé stood at his garden gate and shook his head at La Cora as she came across the pretty churchyard.

"Oh, thou wicked golden hair! wandering again with that black-browed man, whom the Prince of Darkness seems to have marked for his own." But the child's voice came plaintively.

"Oh, father, I cannot find him. When I call, no voice answers me save the heartless echo; when I search, I see only my own shadow."

"Let him bide, or let him go, ma fille," said the Curé, crossing himself. "He is one sold to Satan; he hath banned himself from the Church and from his kind; he fears not God, nor regards man. He is gone, ma fille."

"Oh, not gone from me till he hath heard my message," the plaintive tones came again, as the white-robed form, with its golden mantle of burnished hair, retreated towards the river; on, on, still with his name on her lips so full of tender pathos and entreaty.

"Max! oh, Max! three days are gone since thou hast left thy Cora to call thee in vain."

Suddenly the light step paused, the sad eyes brightened, and she sprang forward like a fawn, as she caught sight of the form she sought.

"Cora, child, leave me alone with the dread companions you would supplant—the relentless purpose, the stern vengeance you would rival with every loving look and touch. I will not, dare not give up; my brother's blood cries to me from the ground. I will have blood for blood. Child or angel, thou temptest thy Max in vain. Keep back,"—he stretched out his arm—"I cannot forgive; and I would not if I could."

How was it she stole within his guard, and like a voice in a dream, so far off, yet so near, the music of that voice came to his ear.

"Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him, until seven times? And he answered and said: I say unto you, not until seven times, but until seventy times seven."

Why does the serpent in his bosom lift its demon head in fierce terror and loosen its hideous coils? Why, when he tried to put her from him, could he only draw his arm close round her, as if to let her go was death?

"Lay thy pure face upon this miserable breast, O child of the

Paradise thy Max hath lost, for at thy touch the fell serpent loosens its awful grasp. If I could forego the vengeance which is my life's purpose: if I could ever forgive my brother's blood for thy sake——"

"For Christ's sake, Max, Who died laden with thy sins to save thy soul. He loves thee as Cora can never love thee."

He suddenly held her off, gazing on her with the wondering reverence men give to a saint.

"Child, know you what you ask of me? Couldst thou do it? Neither father, mother, brother, nor sister hast thou; no human being, as I had, in whom my very soul was wrapped round, whom every tendril of my heart clung to with a love that had no bounds; who was first to me in all the world!"

"Ah! Stay thee, Max! I have one I love as thou hast said; one for whose welfare life would be but a light price, and death lose its sting."

He started, and the direful gloom on his brow deepened as he asked, still holding her:

"Whom lovest thou so well?"

Out of the spiritual eyes his watchful guardian angel surely looked, smiled half sorrowfully as the gentle lips moved.

"Thyself."

There was dead silence for a minute; then, with a strange, incredulous look in his eyes, he said under his breath:

"Am I in a dream? is it angel or spirit or child that I hold? is it possible so pure a being can love St. Mar, wild, seared, fallen as he is? No: I have lost heaven and human love; it *cannot* be true."

"It is true."

Soft and musical as the flowing waters at their feet came the answer; and a new, strange, steadfast light flashed up into the wild, sorrowful eyes.

"Ah! list thee, Cora, if indeed it is the truth. Thou sayest forgive; but if that man were to lure me on to ruin, to forget thee, and then take my life, could'st thou forgive?"

"Ah! Max, not in mine own strength, but in Christ's, who forgave His murderers. Ah! what hath he done to thee in comparison to the wounds thou hast given thy Lord every hour of thy life, every moment of these twenty years? Vengeance is Mine. Thou shalt not kill, saith God; and thou mortal creature of His hand hast dared to set aside the divine command, to clasp to thy bosom the demon of murder, and sell to Satan the body and soul which thy Master hath redeemed at such a price! The death of Christ hath paid thy ransom from eternal death, and yet now thou crucifiest Him afresh with the merciless sword of thy great sin! Crush the thought of the dark crime beneath the weight of the cross; leave justice to Him who gave life, and ere it is too late win pardon by Christ's sacrifice and thy penitence. See! the sun is sinking behind wold and river; shall it go down yet once again upon thy wrath?"

"Cora, Cora, woman or angel, thou hast conquered. I have sinned grievously : teach me to repent."

The proud man's stately form was bowed down at her feet, hiding his passionate weeping in her white robe. It might well have been an angel that bent over the agonised penitent, as she bent over him in deepest love and tenderness, with such a heavenly joy in her beauteous face as the choir above wears, when the messenger lays the tears of repentance before the great white throne. And before that priceless diamond the hideous serpent loosed his last fell coil and fled in terror away, away ; for it could not live in the heart wherein the cross of Christ had been so well planted by the loving hand of the pure being who, henceforth ever at his side, was to lead him on in the golden pathway as his wife and guardian angel.



THE CHURCHYARD BY THE SEA.

Where ocean breezes sweep across the restless deep,
It stands, with headstones quaint with sculpture rude,
Its green turf thickly sown with dust of lives unknown,
Like withered leaves on autumn pathways strewed.

Willow nor cypress bough shadow the dead below,
Nor mournful yew by summer's soft breath stirred,
The dawn, and twilight's fall, never made musical
By carol clear of some sweet-throated bird.

Not from the sunny earth, her tones of sylvan mirth,
Her flowery meads, and plains of waving corn,
But from the treach'rous waves, their rocks and sparry caves,
Unto their rest, were these sad sleepers borne.

Perchance they had their home far from the crested foam,
And blue seas rippling o'er the pink-lipped shells,
Some green vale far away, where sweet-voiced waters play,
And the bee murmurs in the wild flower's bells.

Oh, churchyard drear and lone ! haunted by voices gone,
And silent feet, and lives like rose-leaves shed,
Thy dust shall yet arise, when from our earthly skies
Mists fade away and seas give up their dead !

J. I. L.